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Publisher's Note

by Joan Konner

'Love the Profession, Fight the Industry'

As part of the ritual celebration of graduation, the Columbia Graduate School honored and was honored by the presence of three outstanding journalists: Walter Cronkite, who received this year's Columbia Journalism Award; Michael Maidenberry, an alumnus of the school (Class of '67) and publisher of the Grand Forks Herald, North Dakota, whose challenge and triumph you'll read about in this issue; and William E. Buzenberg, who delivered the traditional Henry J. Pringle commencement lecture. Bill Buzenberg recently departed from his post as vice president of news and information at National Public Radio. Bill took charge of NPR's news division in 1990. He is credited with leading NPR through its strongest period of growth and enhancing its recognition as a primary source of quality news. In September he will become a fellow at Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, & Public Policy for one semester, and in January he takes over as head of news for Minnesota Public Radio. Here are excerpts from Bill Buzenberg's lecture:

I find myself agreeing with Daniel Schorr when he said: "I have loved journalism, not always wisely, but well. I have loved the news profession — not always the news industry." There are many things wrong with journalism today — but the central problem is the conflict between our *profession*, with its soul in public service, and our corporate-controlled *industry*, with its drive for ever-increasing profits. If this speech had a title, it might be: "Love the Profession, Fight the Industry." Simply put: I think the marketplace is the greatest threat to our journalistic independence.

By every financial measure, the American media today are doing extremely well. The big guys are making big bucks, thank you. Revenues are at record levels in print, radio, and TV. Time Warner will have revenues this year of around \$12 billion.

So, this is a golden era for the American media industry. It ought to be a golden era for American journalism as well. But I don't think most journalists see it that way. We are unhappy in our profession today because at certain levels in the journalistic plutocracy (the words of Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*) we have sold our birthright for wealth and stardom. We have let the corporate side of our business market us like so much celebrity soap. But corporate values are not the values of the newsroom.

Making a profit is not a bad thing. Having worked for a money-losing newspaper that folded, I learned there is truth to Colonel McCormick's dictum: "The first duty of a free press is to make a profit." No one is suggesting media conglomerates should operate as philanthropies — but must they not subsidize news, invest in better news, in the public interest?

Just since the mid-1980s, we have had takeovers or mergers of all the major networks, deregulations of public service requirements, the vertical integration of multimedia companies, foreign ownership, and increased concentration in every area.

It's not limited to the commercial media. Because funding is tight, public broadcasting is also trying to leverage its brands, get into multimedia, go entrepreneurial — trying to copy the big guys.

Too often, I believe, we have drifted over to the corporate interest side. Take the issue of free airtime for political candidates. It can reduce the campaign finance corruption of our political process. However, the corporate side says no thank you, we prefer to sell millions of dollars' worth of lucrative advertising to political candidates. Where is the outrage, the shame?

Corporate marketing techniques have adopted focus groups to make decisions about what people want and don't want. I believe the focus group approach used in news is partly responsible for the inadequate and superficial international news coverage we have today. The public interest side is not well served by giving people just what they want.

Synergy is another popular idea on the corporate side of the ledger. We see this "teamwork" when *Good Morning America* does a remote from Disney World, or when NBC News promotes MSNBC. We also saw it when a number of news organizations decided not to spend time covering the new Telecommunications Act. In Ken Auletta's memorable phrase, synergy is "poison for journalists," because we need walls around us to keep our distance and do our jobs.

The corporate side of the media business has lobbied hard in Washington to get new spectrum assigned to them, free of charge, for high-definition television. This spectrum could have been auctioned off for as much as \$70 billion. But the federal government, yielding to special interest lobbying by broadcasters, decided to make a corporate donation of this one-time-only national resource.

If only one-twentieth of the value of the new spectrum were to have been set aside in a trust fund — that's \$3 billion to \$4 billion — that could have paid for all public broadcasting in this country in perpetuity.

The field of news management has to be recognized as the critical, internal battleground it has become. To be a news manager today is to be on a war footing — as an advocate for the public interest and in opposition to corporate values. ♦

TRIBUTE

J. Anthony Lukas, who died in June at 64, was a memorable journalist, one who made a difference. Remarkably, he won Pulitzer Prizes in two different categories: in 1968 for his local reporting for *The New York Times*, and in 1986 for his book on school integration in Boston, *Common Ground*. He was a co-founder of *(More)*, an important journalism review that was absorbed by *CJR*, and a member of our board of editorial advisers. His contributions to journalism will live on; so, too, will the ideas and inspiration that he gave to students as a consistently willing guest lecturer, and to the magazine.

Letters

STRIKING FACTS



DAYACON HARTLEY

Many thanks to Don Gonyea and Mike Hoyt for their eloquent summation of the Detroit newspaper strike and its tragic conse-

quence for the unions ("Fallout From Detroit," *CJR*, May/June). The Audit Bureau of Circulations' figures for March 1997 reinforce Gonyea and Hoyt's conclusion that "two of these companies' proudest newspapers are greatly diminished and a significant part of their city now detests them." Although the strike officially ended in February with the unions' unconditional offer to return, the heavily advertised *Free Press* gained only forty-one subscribers between September 1996 and March 1997, and the *Detroit News* continued its free-fall, losing 1,671.

There's only one way a newspaper can build quality, circulation, and reputation, and it's not by keeping its union tied up in court for years. It's by settling a fair contract, getting its professional staff back to work, and tossing bottom-of-the-barrel replacement workers out the door.

ELLEN C. CREAGER

Locked-out *Free Press* feature writer
Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan

Your article on the protracted labor-management dispute in Detroit quotes John Morton, "the leading newspaper stock analyst," several times. What is missing from your presumed effort to provide an objective "all-sides-considered" analysis is any reference to Morton's background.

In 1977, Morton was retained by Gannett to promote the need of a joint operating agreement. More recently, in a forum on the strike in Detroit, he minimized the importance of National Labor Relations Board action that could oust replacement workers and/or mandate back pay for strikers who offer to return to work but who are not accepted by management. His statement

that the NLRB "is not even on my radar screen" demonstrates an ignorance that contrasts with management concerns. This spring senior management of both Gannett and Knight-Ridder said at their respective annual meetings that NLRB action could materially alter the course of the strike.

Just as you would not quote me taking exception with management actions and identify me only as a careful observer of the Detroit conflict, I believe your readers would be better served by fully identifying Morton, or perhaps finding a truly independent analyst.

BART NAYLOR

Director, Office of Corporate Affairs
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Washington, D.C.

SWITCHING CHANNELS

According to the Nielsen chart in "You News," (*CJR*, May/June), ABC, CBS, and NBC News have lost a combined 14.7 household rating points since 1977-78. It may be true, as author Andie Tucher says, that the drop is partly due to the fact that "so many have been able to go elsewhere — and everywhere — for their news." But they are not doing so during network news hours.

During today's network news hours, virtually the same number of sets are in use as were in '77-'78. That 14.7 drop in network news rating points, however, has not shifted over to cable news but rather to other kinds of cable programs that were previously unavailable.

WILLIAM M. STERNBERG

President
Network Broadcast Marketing Consultants
New York, New York

Why does it not surprise me that Tom Brokaw defends his "news" broadcasts with the zeal that he does? He, Jennings, Rather, and their ilk have the audacity to claim, "That's what the public wants."

Well, I don't want it. For some years now, especially since the 1990 action in Iraq during which the networks uncritically spouted off the party line, I haven't even allowed television news broadcasts

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into my house. That's what you've done, Tom, Peter, and Dan. Sell that to your advertisers.

TIMOTHY P. SCANLON
Hyattsville, Maryland

UNHAPPY TRAILS

Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy are entirely right to sound the alarm to journalists everywhere about a growing number of invasion of privacy claims based on "intrusion upon seclusion" (First Amendment Watch, *CJR*, March/April). But they are wrong in some important respects involving the recent case they cited against investigative reporters for *Inside Edition*.

There were allegations (reported as fact by Alderman and Kennedy) that I and another investigative reporter followed the plaintiff's children to and from school. Those allegations were completely false and clearly contradicted by sworn testimony in court. The additional allegation that we "trailed the whole family to their vacation home" in Florida, also stated as fact by your reporters, was also untrue and contradicted testimony. After a long and expensive battle, the case was settled without the payment of a dime to those who claimed their privacy was invaded.

What ought to scare the daylights out of any journalist about this particular case is the million-dollar legal battle any of us can face even when unobtrusively observing people from public places at a distance. Fortunately, *Inside Edition* had the commitment — and the cash — to stand up to this kind of intimidation. Not every publisher and broadcaster is in the same position.

STEVE WILSON
Investigative reporter
Palm Harbor, Florida

THE GREED FACTOR

Comments by Edward Fritts, president of the National Association of Broadcasters, in "The Solution: Free Airtime" (*CJR*, May/June) underscore the gravest problem that threatens a free and unfettered press in America. Not *Food Lion*-type verdicts. Not media-hostile state court judges. Not even plaintiffs' attorneys who see every investigative report as a potential money-maker.

The greatest threat to the First Amendment is the overwhelming greed and self-interest exhibited by the megamerged multinational communications

empires. Fritts complains that even if in the public interest, a government regulation requiring free airtime for political candidates would constitute a "taking" unpermitted by the Fifth Amendment. While Fritts may be correct that forced speech violates the First Amendment under Supreme Court cases like *Tornillo* and *McIntyre*, his Fifth Amendment protest is laughable in the face of *FCC v. Pacifica*, where the Supreme Court reiterated what Fritts has apparently forgotten: the air waves are the property of the citizens and not of the broadcasters.

CHARLES J. GLASSER, JR.
Associate counsel
Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau & Pachios
Portland, Maine

NO STRIP SEARCH

Here we go again. Your report on the future of press freedom in Hong Kong (*CJR*, May/June) quotes cartoonist Larry Feign as stating that his strip in the *South China Morning Post* was dropped because the paper's chairman "is a friend of Li Peng" — China's premier — "and has multimillion-dollar investments in China."

Since Feign's *Lily Wong* strip was dropped by my predecessor two years ago, this has become a familiar chant among the ranks of "the *Post* has sold out" brigade. The trouble is that not a shed of evidence has ever been produced to back it up.

It is a pity that *CJR* should see fit to give the mantra another whirl — and without asking the *Post* why it dropped the strip. Hardly the kind of standards I'd expect you to espouse: but, then, we've come to realize how little facts and balance count when it comes to writing about the Hong Kong media.

You also repeat Feign's evaluation of himself as having been the most popular feature in the paper. Again, it would be interesting to know what this is based on. But at least it's good to see that somebody 'round here doesn't suffer from the sin of modesty.

JONATHAN FENBY
Editor
South China Morning Post
Hong Kong

CORRECTION

The May/June cover photo of Tom Brokaw should have been credited to Mark Seliger/OUTLINE.

CJR

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HEARST: WHERE JOURNALISM OF DISTINCTION IS AN EVERYDAY STORY.



EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THIS DEADLY FIRE IS HELPING PREVENT ANOTHER ONE.

When an Albany public housing fire claimed the lives of a young mother and child, the *Times Union* covered more than the tragedy. In-depth reports looked at the contributing factors which turned a dangerous situation into a fatal one.

The stories revealed that the fire hydrants were too far away to be accessed by hoses, and there were no access roads for emergency vehicles in the complex. The *Times Union* also discovered that years earlier the Albany Fire Chief had

given a strong written recommendation to the housing office to install a sprinkler system which was never implemented.

The coverage has led to the building of new access roads and the installation of more hydrants. Mandatory sprinklers are now a hot issue in the mayoral campaigns.

This series demonstrates Hearst's continuing commitment to inform and, ultimately, to make a difference.



CJR upfront



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The Wall Street Journal
JACK NELSON,
Los Angeles Times
BROOKS JACKSON, CNN
ANDREW GLASS,
Cox Newspapers
BOB WOODWARD,
The Washington Post

POLITICS

'WE NOW HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN SCANDAL'

Not since Watergate have scandals so dominated the headlines. From Travelgate to Filegate, Paula Jones to Whitewater, they keep coming. Now it's Chinagate, which is helping turn investigative journalism aimed at money in politics into a growth industry. "We are seeing an institutionalization of the money-in-politics beat," says Jack Nelson, the veteran *Los Angeles Times* Washington correspondent. "Now if you advance a story an inch you can get it on page one. It has a life of its own."

Never mind that the public isn't paying close attention. According to a Pew Research Center Poll this spring, only 19 percent of Americans were closely following the recent glut of stories documenting campaign-finance excesses, like the selling of the Lincoln bedroom and the flood of questionable Asian money into both political parties' coffers. During the same period, coverage of the Heaven's Gate mass suicide, the Oklahoma City bombing trial, and the Liggett tobacco settlement all trumped Washington campaign-finance stories, though the finance scandals did win more readers than the cloning of sheep and the ups and downs of the stock market.

And never mind that the stories have not seemed to generate much popular support for campaign finance reform plans. "I don't think it will be a groundswell of public demand that gets reform enacted," says one reform advocate, Thomas Mann, director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution. "Instead it will be a matter of politicians' anticipating how the public might react if they don't do something." Mann puts the chances of legislative action in this Congress at "less than fifty-fifty."

Nonetheless, the Washington bureaus of the nation's major newspapers, as well as magazines like *Time* and broadcasters like CNN, continue to direct more and more resources to covering the money trail. At *The Washington Post*, Bob Woodward, who with Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate story, is back covering politics and money along with a core group of six investigative reporters, and as many as a dozen at peak periods. *The New York Times* has seven investigative reporters — three permanent, four on temporary duty — covering various aspects of Washington's money scandals. Both papers also regularly involve White House, congressional, political, and diplo-

matic correspondents. Also devoting significant reporter power to the money beat are the *Los Angeles Times*, which broke the story of Korean contributions to the Democratic National Committee, and *The Wall Street Journal*, the first paper to page-one the Asian-money story.

Why the seemingly sudden fascination with money in politics? "These stories were just dumped in our laps," says Andy Rosenthal, Washington editor of *The New York Times*, who will become the paper's foreign editor in September. "We decided that these stories were important and needed a lot of resources to follow multiple threads — the general solicitation of illegal campaign contributions, the Lincoln bedroom, Webb Hubbell and his connection to the Riady family, the story of how campaigns are paid for, the hearings on the Hill, what's happening in the states. It's a very rich field."

Also driving press attention is the explosive growth in political contributions, especially so-called "soft money" given to the political parties, which is unregulated and particularly open to abuse. During the 1995-1996 presidential election cycle, Democratic party committees took in a record \$221.6 million, up 36 percent from the 1991-1992 season, while Republicans raised \$416.5 million, a heady 57 percent increase. Says CNN correspondent Brooks Jackson, who's been following the political money trail since the 1970s, when he wrote for *The Associated Press*: "The story is driven by

the sheer volume of money in politics. There's now an arms-race mentality."

But with so many resources invested in the money story, is there also danger of a journalistic arms race with its own excesses? "We now have a vested interest in scandal," says Andy Glass, Washington bureau chief of the Cox Newspapers. "There are people who earn their livings by investigating Clinton and campaign finance. And there is too much of a tendency to hit home runs, to hype things." The *Los Angeles Times*'s Nelson agrees: "We see recycling all the time: a reporter gets one new nugget of news and it's an excuse to rerun the entire story, right on page one, again. I think we've lowered our journalistic standards."

CNN's Jackson worries that the press's traditional watchdog function has been confused and overtaken by "partisans who are waging battle by scandal-mongering, trying to accomplish through ethics committees and special prosecutors what they cannot accomplish at the polls." In that environment, he argues, "it's almost impossible for honest and fair-minded journalists to compete with the sensationalism of the politicians."

The *Wall Street Journal*'s Washington bureau chief, Alan Murray, suggests that the answer is not to compete with the hypes. "I don't think of the money-in-

WHY THE SUDDEN FASCINATION WITH MONEY IN POLITICS?

politics beat as a scandal beat," he says. "One thing we do particularly well is to tell people what influences the political process, and money is clearly one factor." But Murray believes that the funneling of foreign money into campaign coffers is a "true scandal," and the *Journal* has been devoting "more time and effort over the last six months to covering it."

So with the big guns aiming their top talent at Washington money scandals — as are congressional investigators and special prosecutors — it's a good bet this story won't fade any time soon. When scores of reporters have orders to examine a particular area, they'll find something. "As Lyndon Johnson once said," notes Cox's Glass, "with all this horseshit, there must be a pony somewhere."

Ann Reilly Dowd

Dowd is Washington bureau chief of Money magazine.

CIVIC JOURNALISM AN EXPERIMENT THAT DIDN'T WORK

The Pew Charitable Trusts, a foundation built from the estate of Joseph Pew, staunch conservative and oil man, has come on strong in newsrooms in recent years. Its Washington-based Pew Center for Civic Journalism is a self-described "funding catalyst" of projects involving "public discourse and journalism." Since 1993, some 100 dailies, weeklies, and radio and TV stations have received \$1.7 million in Center grants. The money is used by news organizations to help pay for projects or studies done in "civic journalism" style. That means many things, sometimes employing focus groups and "outreach" experts to involve the community in the gathering and presentation of news. To quote from Pew literature, civic journalism tries to help "close the gap between people's lives and political discourse."

This spring, some journalists thought Pew came on too strong, putting its own spin on negative evidence about a civic journalism project undertaken for last year's elections by *The Record* of Hackensack, New Jersey. "The impression is that the funders wanted to promote good news about civic journalism and ignore bad," says Philip Meyer, Knight professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina, a leading proponent of newsroom research and, as it happens, a backer of civic journalism. Counters Ed Fouhy, a former CBS News executive who directs the Pew Center: "What B.S.! It's amazing how simple things get chewed up."

The Center backed a number of projects to improve campaign coverage in 1996. In Hackensack, using \$140,000 in Pew Center funds and investing some \$100,000 of its own money for extra newsprint and other costs, *The Record*, which serves northern New Jersey and has a circulation of 151,000 daily and 210,000 Sunday, conducted an effort called "Campaign Central." David Blomquist, *The Record*'s public affairs editor, worked with Cliff Zukin, a consultant from the Eagleton Institute of

Politics at Rutgers University. The overall supervisor was *The Record*'s editor, Glenn Ritt, now vice president for news and information. Blomquist and Zukin did follow-up research after the November elections on the effects of *The Record*'s foray into civic journalism.

"Campaign Central" appeared daily except Saturdays from Labor Day through election day. Front-page teasers directed readers to the inside full page. It offered such features as a weeklong series on the "values" of New Jerseyans, based on polls, and "On The Air," which reprinted scripts of campaign commercials and "sifted the evidence" for their claims. *The Record* also organized candidate forums, with "ordinary citizens" doing the questioning rather than reporters. There was more, all standard civic journalism fare, stressing issues rather than the horse race.



David Blomquist



Glenn Ritt

It pushed all the public-discourse buttons . . . and it didn't work. In their post-election research, Blomquist and Zukin found, among other things, that:

- Fewer than one in five *Record* subscribers could remember reading "Campaign Central."
- Readers of *The Record* were no better informed than readers of "traditional" coverage in other papers.
- Fully 42 percent of *Record* readers couldn't name either Senate candidate — Democrat Robert Torricelli, the winner, or Republican Dick Zimmer.
- *Record* readers were no more likely to vote in November or even to discuss the campaign with friends than were non-*Record* readers, nor did they report any appreciable change in their opinions as a result of "Campaign Central."

"All the things that we hypothesized about civic journalism," says consultant Zukin, "turned out not to be so. *Record* readers didn't score any differently than other readers."

Blomquist reported on some of the negative "Campaign Central" findings at

a Pew Center workshop in Annapolis in December. In the January issue of *Civic Catalyst*, the Center newsletter, he was quoted as saying that a "Voters Guide" the paper ran the weekend before the election did engage readers. "This is what readers wanted in election coverage, concise side-by-side comparison of issues in bullet form." But "changing the framework from *vox politicus* to *vox populi* may not be enough," Blomquist concluded. "Much of the challenge for journalists is: Can we do this without becoming McPaper and McNews?"

Civic Catalyst said the Hackensack research would be published "in early

THE NEW JERSEYANS WERE NO-SHOWS, AS WAS THEIR REPORT

spring." The program of the fifty-second annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, held at the Marriott in Norfolk, Virginia, May 15-18, listed Zukin, Blomquist, and their paper "Does Civic Journalism Work?" as the second presentation at the May 17 morning session. Several of the top people in the survey-research field, including Phil Meyer, attended specifically to hear Zukin-Blomquist. The New Jerseyans were no-shows, their report withdrawn. As this article was being edited, Fouhy faxed a letter to *CJR*. It said the Norfolk gathering had been told "Blomquist and Zukin have decided not to present their research at this time to allow for some review."

Meyer was upset. "Working in this area, I know how controversial it is," he recalls thinking. "If word gets out that only research showing positive effects is published, we're all suspect."

Zukin told *CJR* there wasn't "censorship" of the negative findings. "Pew said it wanted more time to review our findings," he says, adding that Pew didn't get the finished paper until May 13, and "they said they had some concerns." Although the basic findings had been known since December, Fouhy says "it was a busy week at Pew, so we asked for time to look it over."

A five-way conference call on May 15 connected Fouhy, Pew's Jan Schaffer, Zukin, Blomquist, and Ritt. It took ninety minutes. Fouhy says he told *The Record*

team that "the decision to give or not give the presentation was theirs to make." His letter to *CJR* included a chronology that noted the conference call and said, "Blomquist ultimately proposed holding off" on the presentation. Blomquist says: "I thought it was good research. It would have been fun to discuss with that roomful of colleagues from all over the country," but he finally agreed to delay. Zukin acknowledges "not being fully happy" with the decision to withdraw — those were his peers in the room, too — but adds: "Pew wanted to contextualize our findings."

According to Ritt, that meant Pew wanted to release the findings as "a package." It did, after the Norfolk conferees went home. The final package as mailed by Pew contains a three-page news release that casts *The Record* experiment as valiant civic journalism vs. candidates' malignant TV campaigning: "Nine weeks and 54 full pages of issues-based coverage in the New Jersey Senate race failed to break through the noise of that heated, television-saturated campaign."

The mailing, to about 4,000 people, mostly journalists, included a two-page summary by Pew saying that the findings were limited to one project ("it would be presumptuous to make broad judgments about the overall potential of public journalism") and a six-page "lessons learned" essay by Ritt lamenting a world of "bored" readers and their "distrust" of the media and "nonheroic politicians." Then the Blomquist-Zukin thirty-three-page report appears.

Journalist Hodding Carter, chairman of the Pew Center board, argues that while the "researchers' opinions are the operative ones, to ask if civic journalism works, and then to say on the basis of one experiment that it doesn't, is simply a dishonest question and answer." In his letter to *CJR*, Fouhy declared, "We have published every research report we have commissioned and will continue to do so."

But for critics of civic journalism, the Hackensack experiment exacerbated the fear that those who pay for the show may want to call the tune. That Saturday in Norfolk, when one editor from a major heartland paper heard that the report had been withdrawn, he turned to a seatmate and said: "That's exactly why we don't take outside money."

Edwin Diamond

Edwin Diamond is professor of journalism at New York University.

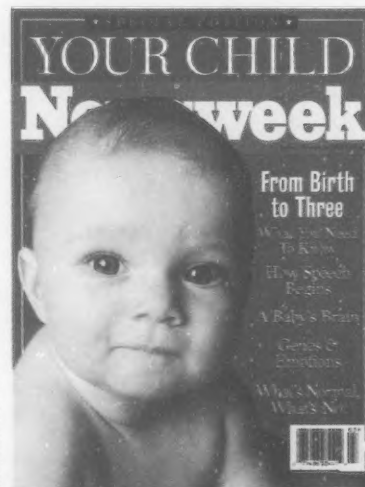
MAGAZINES

CHUCKING THE CHECKERS

Consider the now-infamous error in *Newsweek's* recent special issue on "Your Child": a recommendation that infants as young as five months old be allowed to feed themselves zwiebacks and raw carrot chunks. As most parents know, babies that young can choke on hard foods. When a pediatrician brought the mistake to *Newsweek's* attention, the magazine acted immediately. Recalling several hundred thousand copies from newsstands, hospitals, and doctors' offices, *Newsweek* reprinted and redistributed the issue, mistake corrected.

It happens sometimes: the fact-checker had made a mistake. Such cost, embarrassing (and in this case, potentially dangerous — to babies, at that) errors are the kind of thing researchers and editors have nightmares about. And because *Newsweek*, like many other publications, has scaled back its fact-checking process over the past year, many — rightly or wrongly — have viewed the error as a dramatic symbol of magazines' increasing disregard for accuracy.

Last fall, *Newsweek* offered its entire fact-checking staff the choice between a buyout and a job change, and it now has no full-time fact-checkers. Some checking is done by researcher/reporters (as it



The cover of the costly "zwieback issue"

was in the zwieback incident), all of whom have additional responsibilities.

Under *Newsweek's* old system, virtually the entire magazine was checked, but now, according to assistant managing editor Ann McDaniel, a large portion of the book is "author-checked." This means that writers are expected to get it right the first time around.

Time also has been providing less in-house checking since last fall and expecting more writers to check their own work. Marta Dorion, *Time's* chief of reporters, thinks that the changing system may be turning out better journalists — just as daily newspapers, with deadlines too tight for fact-checking beyond the editing process, may breed more careful writers. Dorion admits that "there have been some bad errors that wouldn't have happened under the old-fashioned system." In a recent feature on the Green Bay Packers, for instance, Dorion notes, "we got their record wrong. That's pretty tacky."

At *Fortune*, changes have been even more drastic. The biweekly business magazine virtually quit fact-checking cold turkey in January — though the editors do make exceptions for hastily reported stories or new writers. Executive editor Rob Norton explains, "Eighty percent of the fact-checking we did was redundant."

Publications from *Vogue* to *The Village Voice* are relaxing standards, relying more on "author checks," or leaving large amounts of copy unchecked.

Not all editors embrace this trend. Since 1992, when Tina Brown took over, the number of *New Yorker* fact-checkers has doubled. The department is famously thorough (known, perhaps apocryphally, for calling the Empire State Building to make sure it was still standing), and now must apply its still-stringent standards on a tighter schedule to allow for Brown's penchant for time-sensitive pieces.

Ellen Levine, editor-in-chief of *Good Housekeeping* — which is actually expanding its fact-checking department — says she is "shocked" that other magazines are getting rid of fact-checkers: "Reporters often overlook their own mistakes." And she points out that magazines have a different kind of responsibility than newspapers: "We have more time to be right."

Time's Dorion says the changes are "entirely budgetary. These systems cost money." And, she notes, editors rarely seek to cut their own jobs. But Ann McDaniel claims that *Newsweek's*

"restructuring" isn't financially motivated, noting the changes have been accompanied by an expensive upgrading of the magazine's library — better computer databases, more information specialists. At *Newsweek*, company lawyers now review copy more carefully than ever for potentially libelous material. McDaniel points out that moving fact-checkers into reporting slots has been to everyone's advantage: "The people who used to be fact-checking are happier in their new jobs, and now we have more reporters." Still, she admits that "there is no doubt about the value of fact-checking. In an ideal world we'd have more people doing it." And the zwieback incident? "One of those human errors."

Fortune's Norton, too, denies that money was a consideration in its restructuring. "It was not a cost-cutting measure. The size of our staff remained the same." Norton doubts that most fact-checking is worthwhile. "Some of our worst errors have been in pieces that were fact-checked. Interestingly, when you know your piece isn't being checked, you take more care."

But Katherine Wessling, *Good Housekeeping's* research editor, who has been fact-checking for eight years, calls phasing out checkers "a big risk. Even the best journalists make mistakes. If you factor in the problem that a lot of people just don't have basic reporting skills, it's a disaster. I don't think I have ever checked an article that didn't have at least one mistake."

Liza Featherstone

Featherstone is a free-lance writer and *CJR* fact-checker.

LANGUAGE CORNER

THE WHOLE AND THE PARTS

The story spoke of "the 30 companies whose stocks comprise the Dow Jones industrial average." It's the other way around. The average comprises the stocks, because the whole comprises the parts. So the stocks make up (or constitute or compose) the average. "Comprise" is a near-synonym for "include," except that it means to include everything. If "include" wouldn't make sense — those stocks don't include the Dow — we can't use "comprise." Nor can we say "is comprised of." Would we say "is included of"? Doesn't make sense.

Evan Jenkins

For more on the language, see *CJR's* website at <http://www.cjr.org>.

CABLE

C-SPAN'S FIGHT FOR RESPECT

C-SPAN's Brian Lamb, the Mr. Rogers of grownup TV, ought to be quite pleased with himself. He has convinced an industry leader notorious for crass consumer contempt to be, well, nice. At least for now.

Since 1992 the founder and head of the nonprofit Cable Satellite Public



Brian Lamb of C-SPAN

Affairs Network has been waging a quiet campaign for space on the cable spectrum. The strategy has been discreet — as befits the architect of a channel known for calculatedly bland objectivity — but, with the support of a famously devoted viewership, it has grown increasingly insistent.

Lamb's lament concerns access to the nation's TV sets. Since the passage of legislation in 1992 that placed new requirements on how cable companies allot their channel space, C-SPAN has suffered major disrespect from those companies — which had created the public affairs channel in the first place. Yet at the same time that the cable systems have been dropping or cutting back their carriage of the service, C-SPAN's reputation has shone ever brighter among viewers and scholars.

Tom Oliphant, *The Boston Globe's* political columnist, calls it "one of the last outposts of civilized conversation."

Edmund Lambeth, a University of Missouri professor who writes about ethics, says it's "a democratizing force for journalists who live in the hinterlands." And New York University professor Jay Rosen declares "C-SPAN is now our most important engine for producing a public record."

Watching has become a nationwide habit. The eighteen-year-old C-SPAN1 channel (which features unedited coverage of the House floor, along with committee meetings, speeches, public conferences, and the occasional talk show) now is available around the clock to 70.4 million viewers, and C-SPAN2 (launched in 1986 with similar programming from the Senate) reaches 46.4 million. About 22 million viewers tune in weekly. They haven't been happy to see their habit forcibly curbed.

Chicago-based reporter David Moberg, who writes about labor issues for a variety of magazines and newspapers, both regional and national, recalls his frustration when C-SPAN2 blinked off his screen. "I was writing about health care, and watching Senate health-care debates," he says. "Suddenly I was staring at a local gospel program. End of story."

C-SPAN's travails reflect its precarious status as a charitable gesture of an industry in perennial need of an image transplant. Cable operators dreamed it up as a legislator-friendly service in 1979. The industry, in fact, got most of its wish list granted in the regulation-lite Cable Act of 1984. But in 1992, reacting to consumer outrage over rates and service, Congress passed deregulating legislation, including "must-carry" requirements.

So cable companies, which until then had been free to pick and choose which and how many broadcast signals they offered viewers, are now required to offer up to a third of their space to local broadcasters. Since the remaining channel space tends to fill up quickly with the cable companies' own programming and lucrative services like home shopping, they often find it tempting — irresistibly so — to bump or shrink their carriage of C-SPAN. About eight million viewers have been cut, C-SPAN calculates, many of them subscribers to the country's largest cable company, TCI (Telecommunications, Inc.).

While Brian Lamb publicly bemoaned the evils of meddlesome regulation, outside observers noted that the new man-

dates weren't the only culprit. "There has never been a shortage of channel capacity," says public interest lawyer Andrew Jay Schwartzman of the Media Access Project. "There has been a shortage of will to carry C-SPAN."

Gradually C-SPAN regained about four million subscribers, adding some through cable's new rival service, direct broadcast satellite. But then in mid-1996

BRIAN LAMB WAS PLAINTIVELY ASKING WHY C-SPAN WAS BEING PUNISHED FOR ITS SUCCESS

media magnate Rupert Murdoch offered TCI — whose stock price was then low — an unprecedented eleven dollars per subscriber to carry the Fox News Channel. TCI managers rearranged their schedules to make room for the money-maker, and C-SPAN started falling off systems again.

Angry viewers began organizing. Regina LaBelle, in Seattle, Washington, found out at her breakfast table that her TCI system was about to become one of forty-five systems in the area to chop or drop the service. "I said, I'm gonna write a letter, and my husband said, let's not stop there, let's start an organization." Her "Citizens for C-SPAN" now has a nationwide 200-name mailing list and contacts across the country. Viewers in Miami; Tucson; Buffalo; Vancouver, Washington; Rochester, Minnesota; and Riverside, California (all TCI systems) launched letter-writing and phone campaigns, some of which have been successful.

Meanwhile, Brian Lamb was plaintively asking, in op-eds and articles in such strategically positioned outlets as *The Washington Monthly*, why C-SPAN was being punished for its success.

Finally, on May 1, the new president of TCI, Leo Hindery — a longtime C-SPAN supporter and board member — pledged the company's full support for the programmer. He promised that TCI would carry both C-SPAN 1 and 2 on all its systems within three years, and pay C-SPAN a small monthly fee — now at six cents for each subscriber whether or not the household actually receives C-SPAN — for the next fifteen years.

Aside from marking Hindery's personal devotion to C-SPAN, the decision also can be seen as a smart marketing move. "This offers an opportunity for TCI to rethink its relationship with its customers and communities," says Willard Rowland, who has dealt with TCI both as dean of the University of Colorado's journalism school and as chairman of a local public TV station.

For LaBelle, the good news has been a "rallying point," encouraging the hope that Seattle might not only reinstate C-SPAN1 but get C-SPAN2. For activist Nancy Brataas, however, a former state senator in Rochester, Minnesota, the glass is only half full. "Do you know how long three years is when you're sixty-nine?" she said. And of course those on non-TCI systems still have no indication of future support — although TCI's clout might well encourage any waverers to follow its example.

So for now, C-SPAN has moved back into cable's good graces. That, according to Brian Lamb, is the way it should be: industry choice, not a guaranteed berth through regulation. For one thing, technological change is unpredictable and rapid these days. Not only may digital compression create new space on tomorrow's cable systems, but the Internet — where you can already hear and see C-SPAN programming at www.c-span.org — may extend C-SPAN's reach in new ways.

And then there is C-SPAN's ultimate defense: organized, politically savvy viewers.

Pat Aufderheide

Aufderheide is an associate professor in the School of Communication at American University.

NEWSPAPERS HELL AND HIGH WATER

By the time the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota, shut down electrical power in the wake of the massive flooding of the Red River, it looked like it was too late for the *Grand Forks Herald*. A newspaper older than the state it inhabited, the *Herald* had succumbed to fires and the river's rising waters, which wiped away a sizable chunk of the town's history: clip files

from as early as 1920, microfilm of issues dating back to 1879, and tens of thousands of photographs. The paper's presses in the basement were among the first casualties.

But the *Herald* continued to publish without missing a day, and learned anew its value to the scattered people of Grand Forks, 90 percent of whom found them-

campus looked downtown and saw a big billow of smoke. That night, it was confirmed that the *Herald* office was among the eleven buildings that burned. The swelling river, meanwhile, forced them to evacuate their temporary quarters.

Undaunted, the paper quickly set up shop at a public school in the nearby town of Manvel (pop. 400). The news-

"hungry for a newspaper. They wanted to read names, see photographs, see facts. The idea that they could be without a newspaper really woke them up."

Left with little infrastructure intact, flood victims were starved for the kind of basic information provided by the *Herald* Helpline, a free message board, through which residents relayed to one another their whereabouts and conditions — "Message from Mary & John Fontaine: We're okay and in Anoka, MN."

Don Gonyea, who covered the flood for National Public Radio, noted that the Helpline, which looked like classified advertising for the diaspora, gave the paper an innate advantage over radio. "I didn't know any of these people in these messages," he said, "but I found myself getting choked up just reading them because you could sense the relief that people would get when they would find someone's name in there." Several of the city's radio stations, meanwhile, pooled their programming, focusing on round-the-clock flood coverage as well as call-in talk radio.

The *Herald*, boosting its circulation by 10,000 for free distribution at shelters, also provided coverage that ranged from the useful — a list of every relief agency in town — to the sublime: a remarkable front-page photo of a full rainbow arching over bombed-out downtown Grand Forks.

The paper continues to publish from the Manvel Public School as it looks for a new temporary home. A production plant eventually will be built in the city's industrial park, outside the flood plain, and the *Herald* plans to occupy its historic building again when it is rebuilt in early 1998.

Meanwhile, there are signs that the situation in Grand Forks may be normalizing. When an anonymous donor known only as "Angel" volunteered \$2,000 to heads of flood-ravaged households recently, the *Herald* revealed the benefactor to be Joan Kroc, the widow of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc. The identification, which Maidenberg insists "is something newspapers do," angered some city officials and residents.

"I think things are getting back to normal," says managing editor Jim Durken. "They're mad at us again."

Frank Houston

Houston is senior writer at FOX News Internet.



A daily budget meeting is held in editor Mike Jacobs's portable trailer, which is parked behind the public elementary school where the *Herald* is now working.

selves suddenly homeless. The city of 50,000, the hub of commerce in the remote northern prairie that extends 300 miles along the Canadian border between North Dakota and Minnesota, lay in ruin. And without electricity for television newscasts, the town looked to the *Herald* as its lifeline.

The headline of the Friday, April 18 edition, the paper's last full press run of 38,000, blared FLOOD HITS HOME. The next morning's run — BROKEN DIKES, SHATTERED HOPES — stopped at 9,500 when the waters began flowing in. At 1 A.M., staff members heard that the office would be surrounded by three to four feet of water by sunrise.

The next day, editor Mike Jacobs issued an all-points bulletin on local radio: "If you work for the *Grand Forks Herald*, report to the University of North Dakota student union." There, after the paper bought the last eight laptops from the university bookstore, publisher Mike Maidenberg issued a decree of sorts: "We are going to publish this newspaper come hell or high water." They got both.

Later, *Herald* employees at the UND

room took over the computer lab, the photo department set up next to the drums in the music room, and classified ads were sold from the counselor's office. Knight-Ridder c.e.o. Tony Ridder arrived with a strong message of hope, that he'd back them to the hilt.

The company, which had spent \$3 million refurbishing the historic downtown Sears building for the *Herald* less than four years ago, brought in US West to set up twenty-eight additional phone lines for the reporters at the Manvel school, from which the paper could be shipped electronically for printing at the Ridder-owned *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, more than 300 miles away. Knight-Ridder also provided nineteen recreational vehicles for homeless staff members, a \$100,000 employee flood-relief fund (it's now more than \$200,000), and several pinch-hitting staff members, including reporters and photographers from other company newspapers.

Equal to Knight-Ridder's devotion to the paper was that of the Grand Forks community. "The response was astonishing," said Maidenberg. People were

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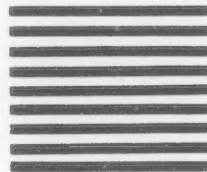
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Molinari Weighs Anchor

Why, after seven years of representing Staten Island and part of Brooklyn in Congress, is Representative Susan Molinari, inevitably described as "a rising star in the Republican party," about to switch firmaments? Hard to tell. As we know by now, CBS has hired



her as the star — er, anchor — of a new two-hour Saturday morning news show, "a sort of 60 Minutes meets Rosie O'Donnell," as Molinari, 39, characterizes it. The program is scheduled to begin in September with a yet-to-be-named co-anchor.

From time to time, Molinari said, she will also do news analysis and reporting on other CBS programs.

Many journalists see this move as yet more evidence that the fault may lie in our stars after all. At a press conference in New York, Molinari and Andrew Heyward, president of CBS News, fended off reporters' queries as to why the congresswoman, who, in the words of one questioner, is "absolutely an amateur" in the news profession, should step straight into an anchor chair ("It's not that she has that Katie Couric look, is it?" Heyward was asked). Others pressed the pair about whether Molinari was "tearing the barricade down" between journalists and the people they cover, and whether she, long considered "one of the biggest flag-wavers in the GOP," could transform herself into an objective journalist. "I don't find that inherently troubling," responded Heyward. "I'm sorry to hear that you do."

But Molinari's trademark perkiness remains impenetrable to criticism. "CBS picked me because of my background — it's an essential part of who I am," she told CJR. "Everybody has a personal bias, but everyone will know mine." She declined to speculate on whether television or politics has a greater influence on the public — "you can't compare the two" — but said that her duty to her viewers would be to "do a show that will make their lives in some respect a little bit simpler, have guests who will analyze news they hadn't thought of, and provide information

to help them make the decisions that are right for them and their families." Both viewers and voters "need to trust you, to rely on you," she said.

In forsaking one constituency for the other, will Molinari be able to keep the trust of both?

Look Who's Doing Agitprop

As one politician leaps with fanfare Agalore into journalism (or an approximation thereof), a well-known journalist is steadily finding more and more satisfaction in politics. Steve Forbes — the multimillionaire editor-in-chief of the business magazine that bears his family's name — enjoyed a boomlet during the Republican presidential primaries in 1996 based partly on his flat-tax proposal and partly on a sort of nerdy chic.

But even Bob Dole's eventual triumph in the primaries didn't send Forbes just slinking back to his magazine. "Winston Churchill was a journalist," he told CJR, "but in terms of getting things done he went into the public arena." That's where Forbes is, too. Last August, in the month of the Republican convention, he launched a political organization called "Americans for Hope, Growth and Opportunity," devoted to championing "a new vision," as its mission statement puts it, "one that relies on family, faith, and freedom — not on Washington."

Through a sophisticated website, a galaxy of radio ads, and a heavy speaking schedule, Forbes, who turns 50 in July, is spreading the gospel of AHGO (pronounced ah-go): a flat tax, term limits, a new privatized Social Security system, a radically shrunken government, more parental control over their children's education. Recently he waged a national radio-ad campaign against so-called "partial-birth" abortions, and testified before Congress urging rejection of the Chemical Weapons Convention. "We're doing what the Marxists call agitprop," Forbes says. "We're out to make things happen."

Forbes has been coy about his inten-



tion to run again for president, though it's a good bet that he will. "It depends on the mood of the country," he says. "If people don't like these ideas, you're not going to move ahead." But he has been spending the pre-pre-primary season exactly as you might expect of a pre-pre-candidate. He's been showing up lately in New Hampshire, black-fly season notwithstanding, and has announced the formation there of his first state AHGO chapter. And he ran a radio-ad campaign supporting a cut in the Iowa state income tax "to bring better jobs to Iowa."

In May, the AllPolitics website calculated the odds on Forbes's election at 75 to 1.

Making the Jump to Africa

First Robert MacNeil, now Charlayne Hunter-Gault. In mid-June the nineteen-year veteran of PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* left her plum job as national correspondent to join her husband, Ron Gault, in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he's been working as managing director of J.P. Morgan since October. Hunter-Gault became a correspondent for *The NewsHour* in 1977, after previous stints as a "Talk of the Town" reporter for *The New Yorker*, an anchor for Washington's WRC-TV, and a metropolitan reporter in Harlem for *The New York Times*.

Hunter-Gault, 55, will be making an 8,000-mile jump across the Atlantic, but doesn't expect life — at least her working life — to change too drastically: "Reporting is reporting wherever you are," she says matter-of-factly.

Almost immediately, National Public Radio signed her up as its chief correspondent in Africa. Hunter-Gault already knows the new territory: she's reported all over the world, including in South Africa, and won a Peabody Award for her work on a *NewsHour* series called "Apartheid's People." She insists that the stories are still there, in abundance, for the reporting. "It's almost a pristine environment," she says of post-apartheid South Africa. Just as in Zaire, she adds, "the real story is what happens after the fight."



MOLINARI: AP/WIDEWORLD/RICHARD BREVIL
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CJR World

BRITAIN

DUMB AND DUMBER?

A transatlantic spat over the quality of the "quality press"

There is something thrilling about an English newsstand. Where an American might expect to see one or two or — the pride of New York — four daily papers, here in London even the meanest corner shop routinely stocks at least nine titles. Nine! Every day! Sundays, too! Your average British journalist takes a raffish pride in the fiercely competitive nature of his trade.

Not to mention the rewards: after a decade or two of high-minded opinionating, a British columnist who doesn't get a knighthood could well feel short-changed. Reporters on British tabloids, meanwhile, console themselves with the knowledge that their (relatively few) words are read by as many as 4.5 million readers. So you'd think that British journalists would hardly be fazed by a little criticism. You would be wrong.

The scene was Ditchley Park, a country house ("mansion" in American) near Oxford where, earlier this year, a conference was held to consider "What Future for Quality Newspapers?" At least that was supposed to be the topic. Instead, the distinguished gathering of top editors and pundits from Britain, the U.S., France, and Germany quickly degenerated into a slanging match, with the Americans and Germans accusing most of the quality British broadsheet press — specifically *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* — of "dumbing down" under the malign influence of Rupert Murdoch. "Boring, boring!" retorted the Brits, accusing their critics of working for papers that were fat

on monopoly profits, lazy, and out of touch with their readers.

New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis, widely credited with inaugurating the hostilities, is unrepentant. "Partly it's 'dumbing down' and partly it's that the reporting has become so ideological," he told CJR. Lewis focused on *The Times*, which he claimed has degenerated under Rupert Murdoch's ownership from one of the world's great newspapers into a shrill, hatchet-wielding scandal-sheet. Other Americans charged that most of Britain's broadsheets have lately become noticeably less authoritative and more frivolous.

Do they have a case?

Certainly British journalism has undergone enormous changes. Economically, a crowded field has been squeezed even tighter by the introduction of new titles and a price war at both ends of the market started by Murdoch in 1993 but quickly joined by his competitors. Politically, the failing fortunes of John Major's government encouraged the press as a whole to take a far less respectful tone than it had under Margaret Thatcher.

Journalistically, too, British newspapers have changed over the past decade. On May 10, for example, *The Times* ran on its front page a photo of two members of the band Spice Girls kissing Prince Charles. In the paper's pre-Murdoch "golden age" such an image would have been unthinkable — mostly because mere pop stars would never have been

seen touching a Royal. Before piling on *The Times*, though, we should note that the same picture also ran on the front page of Conrad Black's *Daily Telegraph*. And it was *The Guardian*, owned not by a tycoon but by a nonprofit foundation, whose front page greeted President Clinton's arrival in London as follows: "The president had a walking stick, calling to mind the old American joke: 'How does a Razorback (Arkansan) count to twenty? Takes his boots off. And twenty-one? Drops his pants.' Now President Clinton can count to twenty-two."

Do all these changes add up to dumber newspapers? Any American answer to that question has to begin by asking some other questions: Compared to what? Starting from what?

British daily journalism is divided into

three segments. The three "red-top" tabloids (*The Sun*, the *Star*, and *The Daily Mirror* all sport red banners) fight it out with contests, cheesecake, and soap-star scandals. With a total circulation of about 9 million, the red tops can't be ignored. But with a news content that makes the *New York Post* look like *The Christian Science Monitor*, the argument



Rupert Murdoch

about standards isn't about them. Nor have the two middle-market tabloids — *The Daily Mail* and *The Express*, sparring over a steadily shrinking readership of 3.5 million — figured much in this debate. Rather the focus is on four of the broadsheets aimed at the so-called "chattering classes" (a fifth broadsheet, the *Financial Times*, is not a target).

British journalists argue that much of what American critics brand as dumb is simply a reflection of their country's

long, honorable — and different — journalistic traditions. Compared with prestigious U.S. broadsheets, for instance, British newspapers seem to shout louder — and to leave little doubt about where they stand. Peter Stothard, who edits *The Times*, explains it this way: "Because we're in a more competitive market, we have to be much more adventurous in getting people to read, understand, and find their way around what you people call the newshole." American papers, he continues, are "produced with the satisfaction of their writers as a very high aim and the satisfaction of their readers as a somewhat lower one."

In America, a newspaper has a pressing obligation to make a profit. But in Britain, where three of the five broadsheets have made virtually no profit this century, a newspaper's first obligation is to be authoritative.

Authority, however, does not always mean accuracy. (In the U.S., "Holocaust denial is illegal," a writer in *The Guardian* blithely declared recently.) *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger himself recently asked: "Why do no British papers carry a regular column, such as American newspapers have, for daily corrections and clarifications?" Probably because it would be too embarrassing.

American newspapers want their readers' trust. "We want all readers to think our news judgment is based on intellectual, not ideological criteria," writes *Washington Post* managing editor Robert Kaiser in the current issue of the *British Journalism Review*.

British newspapers, their defenders would argue, trust their readers. "People choose newspapers here based on support for their own biases," says Roy Greenslade, a former editor of *The Daily Mirror* who now writes a press column for *The Guardian*. "We're used to seeing heavily angled material on the news pages — we know how to read it, how to make allowances." With *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Observer* on the left, *The Independent* in the middle, and *The Times* and *The Telegraph* on the right end of the political spectrum, there is plenty of scope for cross-checking. The cornucopia of commentary and reportage in English news stems from the competition that is, British journalists contend, the most decisive difference between U.S. and U.K. newspaper cultures.

But if much of what looks like

"dumbing down" is really just difference, enough remains to disturb thoughtful observers.

"If 'dumbing down' means less emphasis on and effort devoted to foreign news, you'd have to say yes," says Ian Hargreaves, editor of the left-wing weekly *New Statesman* and a former editor of *The Independent*. There is also less genuine investigative reporting and much more of the kind of prying invasion of privacy also endemic among American newspapers. But Hargreaves warns against the "risk of characterizing anything as 'dumbing down' other than high politics and foreign affairs. Putting more resources into writing about bio-ethics, the breakdown of the family, birth technology — all the issues resulting from the increasing public prominence of women — is a shift in the public agenda that is not really trivial."

Stephen Glover, a co-founder of *The Independent* who now writes a media column for the right-wing weekly *Spectator*, says British broadsheets have gone "from boutiques to supermarkets. You can still find very high quality delicatessen," he says. "What has been lost is a sort of high seriousness."

While Murdoch's *Times* may not be much worse than the other broadsheets — CANADIANS BEAT THEIR BREASTS ON TOPLESS BATHERS was a recent *Guardian* headline — it is clearly the most successful. Five years ago *The Daily Telegraph* sold 1,126,000 copies a day compared with 415,000 for *The Guardian*, 386,000 for *The Independent*, and 368,000 for *The Times*. Today *The Telegraph* has climbed to 1,123,479, *Guardian* sales have slipped to 402,000 and *The Independent* has plunged to 256,000. *The Times*, however, now sells 772,000 copies — more than at any time in the paper's history, and nearly triple the number from the 1930s, when *The Times* was the undisputed voice of the British establishment

(and when it enthusiastically backed the policy of appeasing Hitler).

Some of those gains are the result of Murdoch's price war — at 35 pence *The Times* is 10 pence (about 15 cents) cheaper than its rivals. Most of the rise, though, is probably due to changes in British society, as the mandarin class who once read *The Times* is replaced by the more numerous, slightly less well-educated children of the Thatcherite revolution. Once known — and marketed — as "the top people's paper," *The Times* under Murdoch has become deliberately less elitist.

"Readers who in the past would never have dreamed of buying *The Times* are now reading it," says Stephen Glover. "They switched to a more serious paper — 'dumbed up' if you like."

As a prime beneficiary of this trend, Peter Stothard of *The Times* is understandably bullish: "I believe in Gresham's law — the truth will drive out the trash." The problem is: Gresham's law says that bad money will drive out good — cause for alarm, not reassurance.

Ian Hargreaves is still worried: "With papers operating on very thin editorial resources, corners are getting cut. And all this is happening at a time when the objects of coverage — businesses and politicians — are smarter and faster than ever before."

So which is dumber: a press that panders to its readers, slants its politics, and mixes lots of entertainment with the news? Or a press whose high public standards are built on the (sometimes arranged) absence of competition, and whose cult of objectivity masks its honored place at the very corporate banquet whose manners it should be scrutinizing?

As total newspaper circulation continues to decline on both sides of the Atlantic, the question becomes less academic: Which is dumb? And which is dumber?

D.D. Guttenplan

Guttenplan is a CJR contributing editor working in London.



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Darts & Laurels

◆ **DART** to KCBS-TV, Los Angeles, for inventing a brand-new way to (literally) cover people in the news. Reporter Dave Lopez's April 23 interview with Ernesto and Diane Medina, parents of a ten-year-old boy who was lured from his neighborhood with a kidnapper's tale of a poor lost kitten — and whose naked, decomposed body had just been found by rangers in a California canyon — was a heart-breaker. Seated on a sofa in the family living room, the mother spoke movingly of her love for her son and her trust in God. Together the grieving couple displayed a large framed group of photographs that they planned to bury with him. The effect was somewhat diminished, however, when Ernesto handed off the photos to someone offscreen, revealing the parents sporting t-shirts emblazoned with the KCBS logo. (CJR's calls to KCBS to ask how and why they got the promotional t-shirts went unanswered.) As an outraged Howard Rosenberg, television critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, asked later in his column, "Did the station try to have its logo put on Anthony's coffin, too?"

◆ **DART** to Cindy Adams, *New York Post* columnist, latest nominee for membership in the Curious Coincidences Club. Adams's extended March 20 column on the Oklahoma City bombing, which purported to be based on her own legally obtained, "must-protect-my-sources" copy of Timothy McVeigh's detailed statements to his lawyers, was startlingly similar to an exclusive report for *Playboy* by reporter Ben Fenwick. That story, which was based on lawfully obtained documents prepared under the direction of McVeigh's counsel, had been posted on the magazine's website on March 11. Mysteriously, the similarities in Adams's account included deletions, additions, and corrections of the defense team's documents that had come from Fenwick's own painstaking research.

◆ **LAUREL** to *Modern Healthcare*, for an illuminating report on a less-than-routine procedure. When anti-abortion fever was raging this spring in Washington, the American Medical Association, which has long held fast to the principle of government noninterference in clinical decisions, paradoxically intervened in support of a congressionally sponsored ban on so-called partial-birth abortions. Departing so radically from its previous public stand, as well as from that of other professional groups that oppose the ban, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the AMA's reversal was hard to understand — but only until *Modern Healthcare* published its May 26 issue. There it was revealed by reporter Jonathan Gardner that on May 19 — the very day the AMA

announced its endorsement of Senator Rick Santorum's proposal for a ban — it sent to House Speaker Newt Gingrich a prescription for some of the things the doctors hoped to see in the balanced budget being debated on Capitol Hill. Included in their "wish list": a more favorable formula for Medicare compensation, loosening of medical malpractice laws, and dropping of the rules against physician referrals to services in which they have a financial interest. As Gardner dutifully noted, the AMA and the senator who negotiated its endorsement of the ban were in strong denial of a quid pro quo. Still, such suspicious symptoms would seem to bear rather close watching.

◆ **DART** to the *San Francisco Examiner*, for running scared. Offended by the "wretched excess" of the city's new Nike Town superstore, columnist Stephanie Salter took off in an eloquent Sunday piece on the company's "twisted values." She cited, among other things, the much-publicized exploitation of workers that Nike and dozens of other "hypergreedy" corporations have engaged in at their off-shore factories. Before the laid-out column actually went to press, it hit the wall and died. As editorial-page editor Jim Finefrock later explained to a disappointed Salter, the *Examiner* was afraid that her critical words would trip up plans for the paper's upcoming Nike-sponsored "Bay to Breakers" race. (Finefrock denied that the column had been killed; rather, he told the alternative *San Francisco Weekly*, the *Examiner* "had chosen not to run it.")

◆ **LAUREL** to NBC's *Today* show, for letting the microchips fall where they may. In contrast to the network's embarrassing on-air displays of affection for Microsoft since they got engaged, *Today*'s May 16 "Money" segment on how to get on the information highway was refreshingly synergy-free. Explaining how ten leading Internet service providers rated on reliability, speed, navigation, and so on, an expert advised *Today*'s viewers that tough installation and frustrating technical support had put Microsoft in the number 10 spot, the bottom of the list.

◆ **DART** to environmental reporters Bruce Ritchie of *The Gainesville Sun*; Dean Rebuffoni of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*; Randall Edwards of the *Columbus Dispatch*; and David Ropeik of Boston TV station WCVB, for a case of ethics lite. As disclosed by the newsletter *Environment Writer*, these journalists are among some fifty around the country who have accepted free subscriptions to *Greenwire*, an \$835-a-year electronic environmental news digest, courtesy of Anheuser-Busch. The offer was targeted

to media outlets in regions where the company operates theme parks or breweries and is involved in land-use issues.

◆ **DART** to *USA Today*, for a disturbing flare-up of a chronic disease. Distributed this spring at health-care facilities around the country was yet another of those insidious four-page, four-color, *USA Today*-lookalikes — this time, using the paper's unmistakable typeface, layout, graphics, and features to push the Columbia HCA Healthcare Corporation. Unsurprisingly, the feel-good "news" validated in the "Special Promotional Edition" under the paper's logo (COLUMBIA QUALITY RECOGNIZED: INNOVATIONS AT COLUMBIA HOSPITALS SAVE LIVES) avoided some rather unnerving questions, recently raised by *The New York Times*, about legal and ethical side effects of Columbia Healthcare's practices.

◆ **DART** to *American Way*, the in-flight magazine of American Airlines (estimated readership: 1.6 million), and senior editor Chuck Thompson, for not facing the music. In his January 1 cover story on how forty-something rock 'n' rollers manage (however marginally) to play out their teenage fantasies of touring the world as a band, Thompson underscored the struggles of one such dedicated group known as The Surf Trio. However, somewhere in the number — which also featured the trio in several full-page photos, named their recording label, and mentioned where they could be heard — Thompson missed a beat. As revealed by the Portland paper *Willamette Week*, the writer neglected to note that, working under another name, he is a drummer in the band. Defending his omission of that striking fact, Thompson told the paper, "It's not a story . . . that makes a judgment about whether The Surf Trio is good or bad. It's just about the scene."

◆ **LAUREL** to the Meeker, Colorado, *Herald*, and editor and publisher Glenn R. Troester, for muscular journalism. Late last year, rumors gripped the town that during practice of the high school championship wrestling team, the popular longtime coach, Mike Tate, had broken up a scuffle by lifting one of the young athletes off the ground by his genitals, sending the boy to the hospital and causing serious bodily injury. Troester checked out the rumors and found that they were true. Haunted by a similarly violent incident involving another boy and the team the year before — an incident that, as a newcomer to the wrestling-crazy town, he regretfully had not exposed — Troester grappled with his conscience, sought legal and ethical counsel from journalistic experts, and validated the rumors in a page-one report. Notwithstanding the blows that came within hours — cancellations from subscribers, refusals by storeowners to sell the paper, denunciations from parents, students, teachers, and alumni — the *Herald* continued to report in great detail in ensuing weeks on the coach's arrest and suspen-

sion, the filing of two multimillion-dollar lawsuits by parents of the two assaulted boys against the school district, and the hearing on felony assault charges. A published letter to the editor from a college journalism student who condemned the *Herald* for hurting "this community, the school system, and more people than you realize," prompted Troester to respond. "Let me state it simply," his editorial concluded. "If you are an employee in a public institution, and you become a target of a crime investigation, and we hear about it, we will overturn every rock necessary to get accurate and reliable information, and we will publish it. We will never again be a party to a hush-up, a cover-up, or any other such shenanigans. If we must use confidential sources as a last resort to keep things from getting 'lost,' we will. You can bet we will not go to press unless we can defend what we report. If that incenses college sophomores, so be it."

◆ **DART** to *Home* magazine and *Architectural Digest*, for furthering the infestation of journalistic termites. The March issue of Hachette Filipacchi's *Home* surrounds a dangerously eroded wall: a glossy three-page spread on repainting a Louisiana house that was produced and edited jointly by the magazine's promotions department and Benjamin Moore Paints, a major *Home* advertiser, in conjunction with a contest jointly sponsored by *Home* and Benjamin Moore. As *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out, not only was the spread not identified as advertising, but it was listed in *Home*'s table of contents along with major feature articles. Similarly, the March issue of Condé Nast's *Architectural Digest* confirms an ethically shaky foundation. Apparently the mention of two high-end fabric makers, Clarence House and Brunswick & Fils, in captions throughout the issue some half a dozen times, is but one example of the blueprint drawn by editor Paige Rense: only advertisers are to be identified in captions. "And why," Rense asked the *Journal* reporter, "should I list those who don't support us by advertising over those who do?"

◆ **DART** to *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, for monkeying around with the news. A page-one story (April 3) about Chaka, the prolific gorilla whose seventh offspring — number forty-five for the Cincinnati Zoo — had broken a U.S. record, was accompanied by a full-front, four-color photo of the champ that showed his achievement to be all the more remarkable. Totally bereft of genitalia, Chaka was endowed instead with a lovely, pale green glow. Chided for what one reader called the *Enquirer*'s "obsessive prissiness," the editor explained that the leaf of a (fig?) tree had gotten in the photographer's way.

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.



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A Morality Play in Chicago Wins Applause — But Will the News Really Change?

by Steve Johnson

Most weekdays, the lobby of Chicago's elegantly muscular NBC Tower fills with college kids and curious housewives waiting in line to take part in a ritual of public titillation and opprobrium. There, in studios they rent from WMAQ-TV, Jerry Springer and Jenny Jones tape two of the nation's least high-minded syndicated talk shows, presiding over such appetizing fare as "I Strip with My Family" and "I'm 12 and I Take Care of My 680-Pound Mom." The people who file inside through the metal detector play their parts to perfection: taking behavioral cues from the smirking hosts and harried producers, they applaud in affirmation of conventional morality and hiss at philanderers and frauds.

The studios of the NBC-owned station also, of course, play host to six live local news programs each weekday, and the general idea among the newsroom's squeezed editorial staff has been to produce broadcasts that offer, as much as possible, more thoughtful news amid the paper-thin health

reports and the live shots from murder scenes and snow-dusted side streets.

As May and another quarterly ratings sweeps period approached, the station's general manager tossed together the two worlds under his purview — the budget-battered newscasts and the festivals of dysfunction his tenants run. He decided to court controversy and attention by bringing Jerry Springer onto the news set to deliver nightly commentaries about local issues on WMAQ's number-two-rated 10 P.M. news program.

The result was a clash of symbols that quickly escaped the station's control. It resonated among a Chicago audience that appeared surprisingly eager to register a vote for responsible news programs. It also drew the attention of a national media pack that could not resist the high-profile embodiment of some meaty broadcasting issues.

There was the cheapening of news generally, and television news in particular. There was the place of the tabloid talk-show host in American life. There was even a convincing villain in the person of Joel Cheatwood, WMAQ's vice president of news since February, who had become a news-business star by punching up crime, sex, and glitz on local broadcasts in Miami and Boston.

Steve Johnson is the television critic for the Chicago Tribune.

AP WIDEWORLD PHOTOS/EJ. FEIN

When the noise stopped, the station's respected anchor pair of Carol Marin and Ron Magers had quit on principle, the ratings for WMAQ's newscast had slipped significantly, the bright careers of its two top managers were tainted, and, with help from a crisis-management team brought in to aid Cheatwood and Lyle Banks, WMAQ's president and general manager, the station had put a vigorous damage-control plan into effect.

Springer, meanwhile, had resigned in haste and — after the obligatory round of appearances on talk programs more sober than his own — retreated back to his haven. He was apparently stunned to learn that a hefty portion of the general public viewed him with the same esteem that his audiences demonstrate for ne'er-do-well guests.

The entire saga seemed to play out with what might be called a journalism-school version of the simple morality of a Jerry Springer show. A station that tried a cheap stunt to draw viewers during sweeps got a comeuppance. A news anchor with a record of fighting against her medium's steady debasement received an outpouring of public support. A management team that had begun the sweeps period dropping a hand grenade onto its news set ended it taking out full-page newspaper ads pledging allegiance to traditional journalistic values.

It looked like a lesson, but it also looked like one that contradicted years of doomsaying about viewers and their readiness to be manipulated. Was the WMAQ brouhaha something that could happen only in Chicago, where local news outlets clung to their long tradition of committing journalism even as most other cities' newscasts were going showbiz? Or was it a sign of a more general dissatisfaction among news audiences?

"Maybe I'm naive because I'm now in the reform business," said Tom Rosenstiel, the former *Los Angeles Times* media critic who heads the new Washington-based Project for Excellence in Journalism. "But it shows that audiences do care, and they do get it. Marin clearly helped undo Springer by raising people's awareness to the whole thing and what the stakes were. She made it emblematic and people voted with their feet. It's an important election."

"I hate it when I'm on the side of the moralists," said John Callaway, host of a public-affairs show on the city's main PBS affiliate and one of the most astute

THE ENTIRE SAGA SEEMED TO PLAY OUT WITH A JOURNALISM-SCHOOL VERSION OF THE SIMPLE MORALITY OF A JERRY SPRINGER SHOW



Anchor Carol Marin takes an emotional departure

observers of the Chicago broadcast scene. But, he said, he could find no other turf to occupy.

"I can certainly, for better or worse, respect a management team saying, 'Hey, look, it's our toy shop now. Play ball with us.' But anybody walking into that shop ought to have said, 'Oh my God, I've got Ron Magers, probably the best local anchor in America. And I've got Carol Marin, probably the super-sourced reporter. Now I can go to work on the other stuff,'" said Callaway, founding director of the William Benton Fellowships in Broadcast Journalism at the University of Chicago.

"I don't get it. I just don't get it."

In the current national climate of local television news, what happened at WMAQ was perhaps inevitable. Even the network newscasts, notably NBC's, are drawing fire for veering toward the fluffy. To bemoan the work done on their local counterparts is like finally getting upset

about the Challenger disaster. As far back as 1977, in his book *The Newscasters*, Pulitzer Prize-winning Chicago television critic Ron Powers wrote, "TV journalism in this country — local TV journalism, in particular — is drifting into the sphere of entertainment."

Two decades later — with a few celebrated exceptions — the drift is nearly complete, and it takes something as shocking as Jerry Springer on the nighttime news to wake people from their mute acceptance of that fact.

At about the time the Springer situation was beginning its public life in Chicago, a Denver watchdog group, Rocky Mountain Media Watch, completed its third comprehensive survey of one hundred local newscasts across the nation. Taken on the last day of the February sweeps, the snapshot showed that fifty-nine of the lead stories were about crime and another thirteen were about disasters. Some 43 percent of all the news airtime — factoring out sports and weather — was devoted to crime, disaster, war, or terrorism. Among the nineteen topics given less than 2.5 percent each of the total news time: education, arts, science, children, poverty, civil rights — the kinds of things that mean more to a community's long-term health than one night's killing or one day's mudslide.

"Fifteen of the one hundred newscasts had more commercials than they had news, in terms of airtime," said Paul Klite, the group's executive director. "We're being manipulated, and the ideal of an informed public is being sacrificed."

The culprits are well known by now: budget choppers, ratings pressure, carpetbagging journalists and managers, a public that lacks time to seek more thorough sources of information, and an overreliance by stations on outside consultants and their market research.

Chicago had maintained its reputation as the exception to the nationwide homogenization, corporatization, and simplification of the television news product, probably for longer than it deserved. But when WMAQ hired "the godfather of 'all crime, all the time,'" in Rosenstiel's phrase, that reputation seemed sullied for good.

Cheatwood had first strutted his stuff as news director of WSVN in Miami.

AP/WIDEWORLD PHOTOS/FRED JEWELL



NBC stations president John Rohrbeck (left), does damage control with WMAQ head Lyle Banks

When the station lost its NBC affiliation in 1989, it still had a network-quality news department. Cheatwood's solution to the programming void was to throw up as much news as the station could produce, and to throw it up fast and alluring. Attractive, young female anchors delivered it, music and graphics punched it up, and crime was its bread and butter. In 1993, when Cheatwood also took on a corporate sibling, WHDH in Boston, he offered viewers a more muted — but by Boston standards still shocking — version of his *Miami Vice* style.

And the tactics seemed to work. WSVN, which signed on with Fox, climbed from third to second in the ratings, and the 11 P.M. newscast at WHDH, which switched affiliations to the ratings leader NBC, rose from third to first place.

Well before Cheatwood's arrival from Boston, some of Chicago's newscasts had already begun to tiptoe down the national path toward fluff. But what made the Springer imbroglio truly surprising was that a network-owned station had already lived through a disastrous experiment with sensationalism.

In 1991, WBBM, the CBS-owned station with the proudest journalism heritage among the network trio, looked at its flagging ratings and decided to take a stab at a tabloid newscast. It modeled itself closely on Cheatwood's Miami efforts and hired many people from WSVN. In came the flashy graphics, the shortened stories, the fascination with

unremarkable murders, the signature growling voice that staffers called "the scary announcer," and, especially, the relentless promotional assault.

"The weakest part of the whole thing was the promotion," said Bill Kurtis, the longtime WBBM newsman who left in November to focus on his documentary programs for PBS and cable. "We'd

"FIFTEEN OF ONE HUNDRED LOCAL NEWSCASTS SURVEYED HAD MORE COMMERCIALS THAN THEY HAD NEWS"

actually try and trick viewers with some cute or clever phrase to get them to watch, and then not pay off. The viewer felt, 'I've been had.'"

Although the newscast tied for first in the February 1993 sweeps period, the viewers who came to sample this shocking new style failed to stick around. Ratings sagged, and the station pulled back from the lurid edge. When the alienated former viewers did not return, WBBM fell into the distant third-place hole it has occupied ever since.

Second-ranked WMAQ, meanwhile, was trying to overtake the ratings leader, ABC's WLS-TV, especially at 10 P.M., the primary news battleground and a main economic engine for the stations. WLS's newscast was visually stodgy and

its anchors enjoyed nothing more than a good chuckle on air, but it also delivered a fairly solid, meat-and-potatoes brand of news. Given the cyclical nature of viewer preferences, the ABC station had a remarkable streak going: the news operation had been in first place in all time periods since 1986.

At the NBC station, the lead anchor team of Marin and Magers had been together since 1985, and their no-nonsense style made them especially popular among more educated viewers. Marin was a reporter as well as an anchor, winning national and regional Emmys and often scooping the papers on such news as impending indictments for another batch of city aldermen. Magers, while ever awake to irony, also radiated respect for the role of conveying information. They weren't the anchors you'd find in a promotional spot trimming a Christmas tree with the sports and weather guys.

Even though it rated second, Chicago news insiders say WMAQ was probably making nearly as much money on news as WLS, because advertisers look first at who is watching. WMAQ's demographics were strong, essentially tied with WLS in key areas such as the 18-to-49 and 25-to-54-year-old population.

The station certainly was making hefty profits, said Danice Kern, who quit as WMAQ's acting news director in January after fifteen years there. A station owned and operated by one of the Big Three networks in a city the size of Chicago could well earn profit margins in the vicinity of 50 percent, she said. But at the same time, Kern noted, "stories were being killed on the basis of a photographer's overtime. There was no reinvestment in the product."

But in the eyes of Lyle Banks, now forty-one, the new station head brought on in the spring of 1995 from the network's affiliate in the Norfolk, Virginia, area, the station was underperforming. NBC's prime-time fare was gaining a bigger chunk of the audience (the network would rise to number one in the ratings for the next two seasons), and WMAQ should be able to take advantage of that dedicated viewership to climb past WLS.

Yet Banks's new ideas rubbed WMAQ staffers the wrong way long before he hired Jerry Springer. He brought in as vice president of news Mark Antonitis, who had been with the consulting industry's best-known firm,

Frank N. Magid Associates. Carol Marin publicly expressed her disappointment with the choice of someone from a profession more tuned to market research than news values.

Banks upped the story count, from thirteen items in a half-hour broadcast, he calculated, to twenty or twenty-five. Susan Kennedy, a news writer who lost her job in a recent cutback, said the increase meant the standard voice-over story dropped from thirty seconds to fifteen, roughly three written sentences: "The President was in Bosnia today. He met with this person. And now he's going to Japan," she said. "Is that worth it? I don't think it is."

Banks initiated a station slogan, "Committed to Chicago," an umbrella label that included an aggressive series of community-outreach projects that he also pitched to advertisers as a way to partner with the station's news operation.

In a tape made last year and targeted to advertisers, Banks talks about the civic value of WMAQ projects, including a coat drive for the needy and a homework help hotline, and says he seeks to "enlist a few civic-minded companies and combine our resources for positive change." For a co-sponsor of a local celebrity golf tournament, he says, "on-air drawings [of contest winners]... can feature a c.e.o. or other members of your corporation."

Carol Marin tried to fight these mud-died lines. In the fall of 1995, she refused to read a couple of news items she saw as advertiser-driven — telling viewers at the end of a fire-safety report, for instance, that they could pick up free fire-safety brochures at specific area stores that had sponsored the report, or noting that local hospitals and drug stores were sponsoring a screening project for thyroid disease. Banks suspended her from the 6 P.M. broadcast for three nights.

"We can do a million stories on fire prevention without joining with companies that sell smoke detectors," Marin said. "When you start joining with advertisers to provide information it is an infomercial. That's a more serious and more insidious problem than any Jerry Springer appearance. The so-called community projects were in my judgment only cynically disguised commercial ventures."

The actual events that turned the station's news operation into news unfolded



CHICAGO TRIBUNE/JAMES GUINN

Joel Cheatwood, WMAQ's "godfather of all crime, all the time," hired Springer to make a splash

rapidly. In early February, Cheatwood came on board. "That's when I saw Carol's eyes glaze over, like she was thinking: 'Uh-oh,'" said one newsroom insider. "These clowns are serious about really making this difficult."

Even before Cheatwood started, the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported a rumor that

**SPRINGER TOLD
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NIGHT BEFORE."**

the station was considering a news role for Springer, who is fifty-three. It wasn't as outlandish as it immediately seemed: from 1977 to 1981 Springer had been mayor of Cincinnati and then had spent a decade there as a news anchor and news commentator, for which he won seven regional Emmy awards.

Both Magers and Marin say they went to Banks immediately to protest the idea. They argued that whatever credibility Springer may once have had was long since sacrificed to his show, which not

only exults in parading tawdry misbehaviors but also has been accused of failing to meet basic journalistic standards. A number of guests have charged producers lied to get them to appear or knowingly bought into the guests' own hoaxes, charges the show denies.

"Lyle now says Jerry Springer was a mistake," Magers said. "Jerry Springer wasn't a mistake. It was something he wanted to do. The first thing he told me about Jerry Springer was, 'This will get us a national splash.' And I said, 'It will be for all the wrong reasons, and we will all be stained by it.' And he was laughing. Lyle was laughing at me, saying 'Hey, man, this'll be great.'"

Marin, too, said Springer was the last straw. Her lawyer went to management in March to try to extricate her from her contract. For Banks and Cheatwood, the change was probably not unwelcome. It wasn't just Marin's challenges to Banks's community projects that rankled. She was also earning a reported \$1 million a year, she enjoyed strong loyalty among her coworkers and freedom to pursue her own reporting agenda, and she was a forty-eight-year-old woman in a business where those are rare.

But on April 25, she said, the station exercised an option in her contract that would keep her on through the end of the year.

Two days earlier, management had publicly dropped the Springer bombshell: he would do brief news commentaries on the 10 P.M. newscast from May 5 through the end of the month. When Marin publicly labeled that a slap in the face to staffers and viewers, Banks responded, "I don't really see the big deal. It's not like Jerry is hired to be the new manager."

Banks later would explain the move as an attempt to bring the proud tradition of commentary back to the newscast — in a manner that would draw attention to the role. His regret, he said once the damage-control hoses were out, was that Springer's appearance allowed people to think the newscast was going tabloid.

Springer fueled the uproar with attacks on the very idea of a newscast. He told one reporter that news anchoring was only reading from a TelePrompTer, another that a newscast was traffic, weather, and "who got shot the night before."

After Springer's hiring was announced, Magers, fifty-two, went to

management, too, and asked to be let out of his contract. Insiders say the station was less disposed to let him go: the May-December romance, with older male and younger female, is the model for anchor desk partnerships nationwide, and Magers's was the kind of presence that could lend continuity as Cheatwood's most visible changes in the newscast, scheduled to start in mid-June, were launched.

After it had all gone wrong, WMAQ would contend that Marin's departure had been unfairly linked to Springer's arrival. But the station, despite the late-April contractual move to keep her on, decided to free Marin to resign less than a week later, on May 1, the Thursday before Springer was to start. It was a move widely interpreted as an attempt to maximize publicity.

Her resignation caused even more shockwaves than had the news of Springer's hiring. Both Chicago dailies played it on page one.

"What made this a really big story," said Tom Rosenstiel, the journalism think-tank head, "was not hiring Jerry Springer, but Carol Marin quitting. The news here, at least in part, was somebody in local TV getting up and saying, 'I want to disassociate myself from this.'"

"Carol was responsible for articulating the issue and framing it," said Danice Kern, the former acting news director at WMAQ. "What might those front pages have read? They might have said, 'Marin quits in contractual dispute' . . . Carol made it very clear that her departure was linked to Jerry Springer, but it went far deeper than that. Jerry Springer was the symptom, she said, and she said it consistently and clearly."

The day Marin's resignation hit the papers, switchboard lines at NBC Tower were so jammed that newsroom staffers had to conduct their business by cellular phone. By the time Springer did his first commentary, public opinion was already running against him. A popular local morning-radio shock jock aggressively took his side, and some Chicagoans argued that Springer at least deserved a hearing, but few were ready to speak in favor of the idea.

The seven days in May between Marin's resignation and Springer's were the saga's most bizarre stretch: Springer's tenure on WMAQ news would consist of two nights of commentary and then two long news stories

about Springer and his commentaries.

A long introduction on the first day, May 5, by thirty-four-year-old Allison Rosati, who would become Marin's replacement, almost apologized for the feature before it started. She explained, for the first time, that Springer was only the inaugurator of a regular commentary slot. Ron Magers neither introduced Springer nor appeared in the same camera shot with him; sources say the anchor had by then negotiated a contract exit

"WHAT MADE THIS A BIG STORY WAS NOT HIRING SPRINGER BUT MARIN QUITTING"

whose terms included keeping him apart from the talk-show host until he left the station in the summer.

In so heated an atmosphere Springer might have won points for himself by doing the kind of thoughtful piece that had led John Kiesewetter, the *Cincinnati Enquirer's* TV critic, to lament the loss of his "eloquent," liberal-minded on-air essays when he departed from the newsroom there.

He didn't. In his maiden commentary, the embattled Springer invoked the Holocaust to criticize the popular Carol Marin. During his term as mayor of Cincinnati, he said, he had had to decide whether to give a parade permit to a group of neo-Nazis. He asked his parents, who had lost family members in the Holocaust, whether he should allow the march. Yes, said his parents; that is what America is about. But now, said Springer, "the anchor [who] quit" — he didn't have to mention Marin by name — was saying no, trying to shut him up and deny him his First Amendment rights. He called her "elitist" and a "Walter Cronkite wannabe." His only defense of his talk show was that it was "admittedly wild and crazy."

The phones lit up. Before and after the segment, the station invited viewer response. One early snapshot of public reaction had more than 1,300 calls pro-Marlin and fewer than 70 pro-Springer. Thousands more calls came in and there were no late-reporting precincts for

Springer. Ratings, too, were surprisingly weak: despite the extraordinary publicity, the newscast failed to beat WLS, although it had done so the previous Monday.

The next day, Springer tried a tamer message, a muddled homily about why America and its freedoms make it difficult for churches to enforce doctrine. It was pegged to the installation of the city's new Catholic archbishop the next day, but people weren't listening. The ratings were down more than 30 percent compared with the previous Tuesday.

On Wednesday, *The Cincinnati Post* ran a story headlined TODAY'S SPRINGER: TALK SHOW HOSTS WHO FIB. The paper reported that during his first commentary Springer had exaggerated his role in granting the permit to the neo-Nazis. Cincinnati's mayor was largely a figurehead, the *Post* story said, and parade permits were someone else's responsibility.

In a statement and interviews Wednesday, Springer responded that he had offered the essential truth: he had taken part in meetings with the relevant officials about whether to grant the permit, and he had been prepared to resign if his parents said no to the march.

That night, in lieu of a Springer commentary, WMAQ offered a report on the *Post's* allegations, but ended with a quote from Banks accepting Springer's explanation and announcing that the commentator would be back on Thursday to talk about Dennis Rodman of the Chicago Bulls. What started as the right news impulse — to cover the controversy — declined into a promo, a desperate attempt to salvage a disaster by invoking Chicago's most powerful viewer magnet.

Chicago would never learn what Springer thought of Rodman. Sometime after the news Wednesday — which saw another week-to-week viewership drop of more than 30 percent — Springer broached the topic of his resignation and Banks and Cheatwood accepted. But Springer was still destined to appear one more time.

In one of the station's longest single reports in memory — and certainly its most surreal — it spent six-plus minutes, roughly one-quarter of Thursday's 10 P.M. newscast, covering the news of Springer's resignation. Banks, interviewed by one of his reporters, acknowledged he would not hire Springer again, though he seemed bothered as much by

the harm that had been done to the talk-show host as to his station. The following week saw a visit from a damage-control team from New York, including John Rohrbeck, the president of NBC television stations, who said he was there to support his managers.

Their plan included announcing that four station veterans would be members of the new anchor teams for the 10 P.M. and early-evening newscasts; buying full-page ads in local

WMAQ SPENT ROUGHLY ONE-QUARTER OF THURSDAY'S BROADCAST COVERING SPRINGER'S RESIGNATION

newspapers featuring the new team and pledging "to provide you with the fairest, most accurate and balanced news coverage possible"; and releasing Magers from his contract earlier than planned.

A statement to the media stressed the station's commitment to solid journalism, while also mentioning, in a quote attributed to Cheatwood, that "we're the only Chicago news organization with two helicopters used exclusively for breaking news and traffic."

Magers's final day would be May 21, the final day of the sweeps ratings period. The timing was not coincidental: WMAQ's highest-rated 10 P.M. newscast of the period had come the night Marin delivered her on-air farewell to viewers. With virtually no advance publicity — the resignation had come in the afternoon — that program drew some 27 percent of all TV-owning households in the area, a number 50 percent better than the previous Thursday.

At the end of the May sweeps, the period that is crucial to determining advertising rates through November, the losses for WMAQ were substantial. The NBC station remained in second place among local 10 P.M. newscasts, but its average viewership had dropped some 14 percent after Marin's departure. And WLS, the station WMAQ is bent on besting for first place, ended the period by bragging it had won the largest margin of victory at 10 P.M. in a May sweeps since 1978.

Whether such trends will continue or the station will recover is anyone's guess. Cheatwood had not exhausted his bag of tricks; his redesign of the news set and graphics was to make its debut this summer, along with a new label for the station's news: "NewsChannel 5."

But if Marin and Magers do sign on with another Chicago station — they both have said they want to stay in town — they will serve as a nagging reminder of how WMAQ tried to jolt viewers into watching by bringing a tabloid talk host onto a news set.

"I'm a bit uncomfortable with the

number of people who have placed this on some higher moral plane," said Ron Magers. "This isn't about saving television. Jerry Springer is still going to be on television. This is simply about two journalists making separate decisions that they couldn't work for people who thought this was a good idea.

"We all make compromises along the way. We'd all like to carry our flag a little higher. We all hope that at the end of our career we aren't that beaten-down sot who will do or write anything for anybody. The timing just conspired that Carol and I were able to say, 'We won't do this.'" ♦



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THE FUTURE OF ON LINE JOURNALISM

BONANZA OR BLACK HOLE?

by John V. Pavlik

If you build it they will come — at least some of them. Imagine a library that carries the equivalent of 1,600 daily newspapers from all over the globe. Now stop imagining. It's here: the Internet provides more news content than that every day, most of it free. So it's not surprising that increasing numbers of the world's forty million to fifty million Internet users are going online for their news.

The wild Internet provides a lot of information of dubious value, of course, which is part of what makes going online

an adventure. But the digitally up-to-date also know that the quality of much of the news online is as high as that of leading newspapers or newsmagazines or TV or radio outlets, because much of it comes from those media.

Yet that fact leads to a question: If online journalism is little more than another delivery system for "old" media — even if it's a potentially better delivery system — what's all the fuss about? In terms of journalism, what's the point?

For many of us in this field, the point is to engage the unengaged. Some of us envision a kind of news that, as it upholds the highest journalistic standards, will allow news consumers to understand the meaning of the day's events in a personalized context that makes better sense to them than traditional media do now.

Since networked new media can be interactive, on-demand, customizable;

since it can incorporate new combinations of text, images, moving images, and sound; since it can build new communities based on shared interests and concerns; and since it has the almost unlimited space to offer levels of reportorial depth, texture, and context that are impossible in any other medium — new media can transform journalism.

An example from MSNBC on the Internet nicely illustrates the potential. On February 21, NBC's *Dateline* ran a piece about dangerous roads in America, zeroing in on three particularly treacherous thoroughfares. The program invited viewers to log onto the MSNBC site to learn about roads in their community. Those who did so could enter their zip code and, within seconds, based on federal data, find out how many fatal accidents had occurred in that community between 1992 and 1995 and on which roads. Within twelve hours MSNBC logged 68,000 visitors to that feature.

Money magazine's Money Online — which won the 1997 National Magazine Award for new media, the first time such an online award has been given — provides another example. Back when Steve Forbes was pushing the flat-tax concept in his presidential campaign, a Money Online feature allowed people to key in their earnings profile and see how the proposed tax would affect them.

Yes, the potential to customize content also means readers may select only what appeals to their narrowest interests. This "You News" kind of journalism could thus become a force for atomization, for further civic decay.

But the optimists, and I am one of them, don't believe it. Research for half a century indicates that people use media, new or old, to connect to society, not separate. People go online primarily to connect with the news of their community, whether a geographical community or one formed around some other common bond. They use customization features to supplement their general news appetites, following their particular interests in finance, travel, education, the environment, or any number of things. So, rather than fracturing society, new media — with online journalism at its core — can help to keep us connected.

Must publishers participate? Will read-

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TOM ONEIL

ers and/or advertisers ever pay for it? For one skeptical view on that, see Denise Caruso's article on page 32. My own sense is that if we make the journalism engaging enough, it will gain financial support. Already, we can see glimmers of a transformed journalism in some of the good online work that is out there now.

NEWS ONLINE: A 1997 BAEDER

Think of the online news world as a vast virtual newspaper divided into sections — national, regional, business, technology, politics/culture/opinion, and sports. (There is an international section — a variety of notable online journalism offerings from outside the U.S., such as the Spanish-language *La Nacion Online* of Costa Rica or *The Jerusalem Post Daily Internet Edition* — but I'll focus on domestic news here.)

Within these sections, who is doing the job well? Which sites are beginning to produce a new kind of journalism? Here are some of them.

NATIONAL NEWS

The best national news sites are those that, along with repackaging or "repurposing" their regular print content, offer original material designed specifically for the Web. The *CyberTimes* section of *The New York Times* on the Web, for example, provides extensive original coverage of new media. The *Times* online version also publishes photojournalism, such as a photo essay by Sebastião Salgado documenting the plight of Brazil's "Landless Workers' Movement" — forty-two images, accompanied by audio captions from Salgado, news reports, a map, and various archival materials.

Many national sites also cover breaking news, and the better ones use their reservoirs of space to add depth and texture. The *Washington Post's* website, for instance, offered thorough online coverage of the surprising recent Iranian presidential election, adding news that did not appear in the printed *Post*, reference material, and other resources. The site showed the capability to do some original reporting recently by supplementing a special *Post* report — titled D.C. SCHOOLS: A SYSTEM IN CRISIS — about that education system's collapsing infrastructure, bloated bureaucracy, and fail-



Robert Fixmer,
editor of *CyberTimes*

ing special-education programs. The website's report added a comparison of 1996 SAT scores between D.C. and suburban schools, profiled the Board of Trustees, and invited online reader discussions.

Time Online impressively covered the Heaven's Gate tragedy — offering detailed reporting from the magazine's online staff as well as the print side, extensive photo coverage, and even an electronic link to Heaven's Gate's own website, which allowed visitors to learn about the cult from its members' words. *Time's* site became an important historical record, with layers of content that the printed magazine couldn't accommodate.

Similarly, CNN Interactive — which is one of the world's busiest news websites with some 3.5 million "page views" a day — features extensive original coverage of the environment and ecological issues. And CNN Interactive goes into considerable depth on all kinds of stories that get only a minute or two on TV.

REGIONAL NEWS

Mercury Center, website of the *San Jose Mercury News*, is known recently for increasing the impact of the paper's widely debated "Dark Alliance" series (see "Soul Searching in San Jose," page 38), partly by spreading the series way beyond the paper's circulation area and partly by adding original documents (court transcripts, search warrant documents, and so forth), along with photos and even sounds (including a section of a wiretap of a drug dealer), to the basic story. But the site is famous for such use of layered publishing on many stories.

Mercury Center features simple and easy-to-use navigational tools that allow the reader access to every section and service in the site. The top of the page offers an index of sections, from Asia Report to Talent Scout, and services, from the Mercury Mall to the Yellow Pages. The Yellow Pages gives readers access to Zip2, an electronic directory of more than 16 million businesses nationwide, fully

continued on page 33



Bob Arnold,
editor,
BusinessWeek Online



Show Me the Money!

How the FUD factor has online news in its thrall

by Denise Caruso

I didn't see the movie *Jerry Maguire*, but God knows I've heard "Show me the money!" enough to drive me nuts.

As is Hollywood's wont, that catchy little phrase was thrust with so much velocity into the mass media that it instantly became a cultural spore, propagating itself into countless headlines and stand-up routines. Its ubiquity almost lulled us into believing we actually knew the story without ever having seen the movie. In fact, "Show me the money!" — in a dual role as rallying cry and cultural spore — is an appropriate starting point for assessing the wretched state of financial affairs for news organizations online.

First, and at long last, it appears that many people with financial responsibility for online news operations on the World Wide Web are weary of hemorrhaging cash. After far too many years of talk about revenue and nary a peep about profit, they would very much like for someone, anyone, to show them the money.

Second, the questions that one would assume are most critical to news organizations online — i.e., "Where is the money?" and "How long will we have to wait to see it?" — should have been answered long before now. If anyone had ever bothered to really demand some old-fashioned financial accountability, today's state of affairs would likely be less dismal.

And third, the idea that news organizations had no choice but to make a transition to the Web in the first place was very much the result of a virulent spore that infected the entire media industry, causing everyone therein to believe they could survive only if they invested mightily in an online presence. Like those of us who only heard about *Jerry Maguire*, they knew a lot less about the story than they thought.

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The progenitor of this particular spore was the awesome hype machine of the technology industry, which back in the early 1990s started issuing press releases about how newspapers and television were on the brink of being replaced by new, interactive services delivered over the global Internet. These new services, not incidentally, were based on products that it just so happened technology vendors were selling. News folks, some of whom continue to brag to this day about their computer illiteracy, didn't have enough knowledge or courage to challenge the industry's assertions. They believed what they were told.



Like Cuba Gooding, Jr. in *Jerry Maguire*, online news organizations would like to see some money.

In Silicon Valley, the conscious creation of this environment of Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt is a marketing tactic that actually has a name. It's called the FUD Factor, and in its thrall news organizations began racing to get online before it was "too late."

In the seven-plus years that I've been writing about technology and media, I never once met an editor or a publisher who asked, "Too late for what?" Instead, because no one would admit he or she was being driven by FUD, media companies scrambled to come up with some kind of business rationale for their online efforts.

Some said that their "investments" would yield fruit when the market catches up to their vision (a subset of this group have now decided that that market will never happen). Others — companies like

Time Warner, for example — started out thinking online was a business, but in light of no profits have since shifted perspective. In fact, Time Inc. c.e.o. Don Logan may have been the first media executive to publicly note that the emperor had no clothes when, in November of 1995, he called Time's online efforts a "black hole" for money.

Time, and others with enough cash to stay the course, now choose to see their online efforts as an opportunity to experiment, testing new media concepts on real customers (which is what everybody should have done in the first place).

But none of these rationales, then or now, was based on a realistic economic model. That's because there isn't one. And there won't be until at least these three nasty and very tightly coupled problems are attended to:

One: News has become a commodity, like laundry soap or videocassettes. It is ubiquitous and cheap, if not free, to millions of people every day. But unlike soap or tapes it is incredibly expensive to produce and the cost of producing it does not go down as a function of volume. This was an impossible situation even before the Web.

Enter online and the situation gets worse. The easy money many organizations thought they could make by simply digitizing and slapping up onto the Web the stories already filed for today's newspapers or news broadcasts never even came close to materializing.

Two: Advertising support, which provides much or all of the funding for news organizations' traditional offerings, is unreliable at best as a revenue source for online news.

Because online news is a commodity and customers don't pay real money for it, once an organization takes its product and its revenue model online, it becomes vulnerable to a phalanx of new competitors. Geography no longer matters. News providers are no longer competing only with each other, but also with content

aggregators like America Online and the Microsoft Network and Netscape and Yahoo!, all of which court advertisers as aggressively as any publication or television network in history.

What's even more worrisome is what has already started happening to classified and local advertising dollars because of online technology. Smaller and independent papers, which now survive on local news and advertising because global and national news is a commodity, are seeing companies like the omnivorous Microsoft Corporation fire up its Sidewalk local listings service.

The problems with online advertising are not limited to revenues. The Web was not designed as a commercial medium, but as a way to distribute and connect information to communities of interest; thus any line drawn between advertising and editorial is unnatural by definition.

For example, most news stories online link to other websites; you can jump from site to site with the click of a mouse. Linking is integral to the medium, and readers should and do expect it. But readers do not expect news sites to include links that were inserted because they were paid for. Today there's no way of knowing if that happens. In fact, there has already been a furor or two over paid links, unidentified as such, on popular non-news sites. If and when online news publishers are tempted to sell commercial links inside news stories, we will already be way down the slippery slope of credibility.

At some point, a sentient being may be inspired to ask, "If the online news business is so ridiculous, why are we doing it?" Given the absence of reason outlined so far, the only apparent response is: "Because everyone else is." Which leads to the final point, one which my mother used on me, to great effect, in grade school.

Three: "If everyone else jumped off the bridge, would you do it, too?" So far, no one has demonstrated there is any great customer benefit — besides immediacy — to online news. Unless you're a sports nut or a stock investor or an information junkie in some area or another, immediacy doesn't have much real value except as a marketing tactic.

And the much-vaunted "community" aspect of having an online news organization — chat and bulletin boards about stories — is hardly worth the effort. Online communities are extremely valuable where

people share specialized interests; that's why sites such as Parent Soup, a place where parents can find resources and electronic discussion about parenting, are so popular.

But for a news organization? I don't think so. Sure, every once in a while something interesting comes out of electronic discussions on them. For the most part, however, people who participate seem to have a bit of trouble socializing. Often enough, if the messages aren't banal, they're offensive.

Still, everybody's trying to do whatever's possible, from chat to photos and audio and video and Java and games and contests — dangling any carrot they can to get visitors. They're all being very stoic about hanging in there because they don't want to be seen as past their prime.

This is a bad reason to spend millions of dollars. Instead, online news organizations ought to be taking a giant step back and asking themselves, "How can we be of service? What is the value proposition for our customers? What can we give them online that they can't get any other way — that they will thank us, and pay us, for?"

Maybe the answer is, "Nothing." Seriously, it's possible. But it is also possible for news organizations to set aside everything they think they know and look at the landscape with fresh eyes.

So, news is a commodity? Then maybe it's time to think about how to create and sell high-value information to a subset of one's existing customers. Everything on the Web has to be free? Then detour the Web. Use other paths through the Internet. Think about how to use the cost advantages of digital distribution without the Web and its freebie culture.

After all, it's not like there are any rules. It is entirely acceptable to make something up and if it doesn't work, try something else. As says Nick Donatiello, president of the consumer research firm Odyssey L.P., "It is much less important to be first than to be right."

Creative problem-solving, not business as usual, is the only thing that will allow the news business to wrest control of its destiny from the forces of FUD, which got it into this mess in the first place. It won't be as easy as digitizing a newspaper page or video footage and pretending that's the future, but I suspect it will be a bit more fruitful.

searchable. all for free — a capability no print outlet can match.

The site also offers Good Morning Silicon Valley, special online coverage of the high-tech industry. Another feature is the digital News Library, where readers can call up more than a million articles, including all stories in the *Merc* published since 1985 plus the archives of nineteen other Knight-Ridder papers. Readers can run free searches that return a list of headlines and the first graf of every story. Beyond that, only subscribers can get full stories, paying a minimum of twenty-five cents apiece.

As an example of how journalists can employ the near limitless space of the Web to add depth and context, consider how the *Chicago Tribune* used its website to memorialize Mike Royko after he died April 29. The interactive tribute includes fourteen news stories about Royko, an electronic message board where some 700 readers had posted messages by the end of May, and an archive of dozens of Royko's best columns.

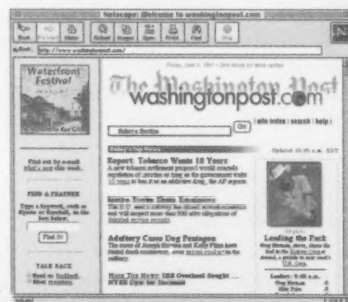
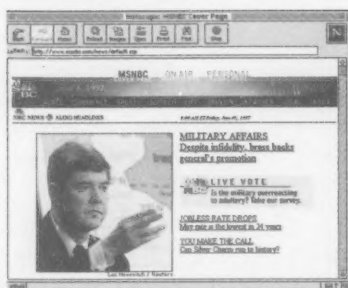
Tribune Company is a partner in an interactive feature called Digital City, which offers entertainment, lifestyle, and community information at the local websites of newspapers in its chain, such as *The Orlando Sentinel*. Digital City is a direct competitor with Microsoft's online city-based service, Sidewalk, which gives readers similar community information, including movie and restaurant reviews, and theater guides.

Boston.com has set the standard for convergence — the coming together of once separate media, print and electronic, in a digital, networked environment. The site provides not only an electronic window into Boston's arts, weather, and commerce, but also gives you access to the online content of eighteen local media, including *The Boston Globe*, *Banker & Tradesman* (Massachusetts business news), and WGBH, Boston's celebrated public broadcaster.

For quality original online news content, The Nando Times — the technologically innovative website affiliated with *The Raleigh News & Observer*, a McClatchy paper — has helped set the standard. One of the site's hallmarks is its interactive Nando News Watcher, which uses "push" Internet broadcasting technology to broadcast, or "push," content to the user. The News Watcher continuously feeds cus-

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COVER STORIES/NEW MEDIA



tomized local, regional, national, and international news to your computer screen, where it retreats to a small window when you are using another application.

Among small-city papers distinguishing themselves in the online arena is the flood-battling *Grand Forks Herald* in North Dakota (see page 14). The 38,000-circulation daily has used its Northscape website to serve its beleaguered community. A number of news websites include access to The Wire, the site introduced in 1996 by The Associated Press that provides continuously updated breaking news. New Jersey Online and *The Dallas Morning News* were the first to run The Wire, but they've been followed by many others.

BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL

The best offer a combination of straight reporting and analysis, plus features not possible in print or broadcast media. Bloomberg Personal, Reuters, The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition, and CNNfn all provide near-real-time stock quotes updated regularly, as well as financial research tools, such as company profiles. CNNfn also offers an interactive mortgage calculator for people trying to figure how much house they can pay for. Rich Zahradnik, vice-president of CNNfn Interactive, says "page views" — a more conservative and accurate count than "hits" — at the site have increased from about five million a month in 1996 to some thirty-six million a month. And Lou Dobbs, anchor of CNNfn and executive vice-president of CNN, contends that the interactive capabilities keep people lingering at the site, a challenge for new media publishers, who find the Net-surfer attention span is short.

Business Week Online, a finalist for the National Magazine Award for new media this year, also has services and material to hold the user's interest. Bob Arnold, its editor, notes that Business Week Online includes every word printed by the magazine and its international sisters, as well as a daily briefing culled from Standard & Poor's and from news items filed by the *Business Week* staff around the world — primarily reporting that might not find its way into the magazine because of space or timing. The site also offers a searchable electronic archive of *Business Week* dating to 1991 and

expanded coverage of one of its franchises, the ranking and evaluation of business schools. Since technology is an important subject in the magazine, Business Week Online offers "Maven," a computer buying guide produced in conjunction with National Software Testing Laboratories, another McGraw-Hill property. The site has been host to more than 300 online conference and chat sessions on America Online.

TECHNOLOGY

The most popular online news is about information technology. CNET: The Computer Network, is a combination of websites, and it publishes perhaps the premier website on computer developments for the general consumer audience at its News.com site (see page 37).

Ziff Davis's ZDNet publishes infotech news and product reviews geared for professionals. A recent special report, for example, reviews CD-ROM drives of every speed and type. Readers can customize the report, requesting a graphical display of the drives, say, from best to worst in terms of a variety of characteristics such as speed, performance, or ease of installation. The site also offers downloads of more than 1,000 software packages. And it provides news, which readers can customize for six subjects, issues, or companies. All free.

CULTURE, OPINION, AND POLITICS

The Web has produced a set of chic and well-traveled destinations for the digital literati, the best of which engage readers in discussions and push the storytelling envelope. Some are connected to print publications. One of the most visited sites is HotWired, the online cousin of *Wired* magazine, which features commentary on new media issues.

The recently renamed Atlantic Unbound, the online offering since 1993 of *The Atlantic Monthly*, has offered readers an electronic window into politics, society, the arts, and culture. In addition to content from its print sister, Atlantic Unbound offers a variety of interactive features, including "Post & Riposte," where readers discuss political and cultural issues raised in the magazine, as well as online-only articles.

Among those innovative Web publications unconnected to a paper parent is

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Why Web Warriors Might Worry

by Andie Tucher

Part of the pleasure and excitement of online journalism is smashing antique rules, overturning taboos, and rethinking the very idea of news. Part of the danger is that some of those antique rules still make sense and some of those taboos can still keep us from eating our mothers — or our standards. In the brave but chaotic new world of online journalism, rethinking the news doesn't always mean improving it.

Even some optimistic observers have several areas of concern:

INTERACTIVITY. This is supposed to be the most distinctive contribution of online journalism. Webheads see interactivity as a way to draw millions of mouse potatoes together in a virtual community, to engage and involve them in the news, and to stimulate public debate. Well, sometimes.

Take, for example, the CNN-Time website AllPolitics, which runs the gamut of interactive devices and gimmicks: free-form bulletin boards, instant "Take a Stand" polls ("Is FDR the greatest president of the 20th century?"), an e-mail forum called "Voter's Voice" on the issue of the day (late-term abortion, the budget), and a daily trivia quiz that can earn you a totebag and your name in lights, or at least in HTML. Throughout 1996 the site offered a riot of campaign-theme games, including a post-election single-elimination tournament called "Pitfalls" designed to predict Bill Clinton's biggest second-term problem. (Campaign fund-raising beat out Hillary and Bosnia, among others.)

Bulletin boards and e-mail may make for discussions as feisty as anything that iconic old town square ever saw — but much of this famous "interactivity" is closer in spirit to *Jeopardy* than to a C-SPAN call-in. Why should a website's instant poll on FDR's status be hailed as constructive engagement when the networks' overnight tracking polls on Bob Dole's status were routinely denounced as shallow or undemocratic? Why is sitting alone pondering a trivia question about Millie, the former First Dog, more communitarian than sitting alone heaving your shoe at the television set?

Some new-media mavens also boast how much more accessible — and thus accountable — online journalists are than traditional newsmen. But while reader feedback can help keep reporters honest, some new-media journalists are toying with another use of reader opinion that skates close to an abdica-

tion of their editorial judgment. MSNBC, for instance, invites you to rate the stories you read on a scale of one to seven according to how highly you would recommend each one to other "viewers," as MSNBC calls them. After you submit your rating, you're whisked to a page that lists the Top Ten stories of the minute with their scores.

According to Merrill Brown, editor-in-chief of MSNBC Interactive, the goal of the ranking is "principally and almost solely" to help people "share good ideas about interesting stuff they found in a deep, rich news environment that can be difficult to navigate, and also to give us some clues about what people are interested in." He insists that the rankings play no role in editorial decision-making. "In the hands of Rupert Murdoch it would turn out that way," he says, "but we're pretty serious about this enterprise." Serious or not, it's hard not to notice how many health stories land in the Top Ten — and how many new health stories crowd the MSNBC site every day.

◆ **CREDIBILITY AND AUTHORITY.** On the Web, journalism, parajournalism, and pseudojournalism don't just coexist; they invade each other, through the handy online device of the hypertext link. While a newspaper editor can — theoretically, anyway — maintain iron control over the content of her four sections' worth of newsprint, no online journalist, no matter how scrupulous his own standards, can predict where his readers might daisy-chain their way. Even the most respectable news site has the potential to launch the unwary surfer straight through the looking glass.

The Web browser interested in the JonBenet Ramsey case, for instance — the Christmas-night murder of the children's-beauty-pageant queen in Colorado — might logically choose to start with the perfectly credible *Denver Post*, a local paper that has devoted extensive coverage to the crime. But the *Post* website includes a link to the home page of the Boulder sheriff's office. The sheriff's page links to a resource called "Law Enforcement Sites." And that site can take you to something blandly entitled "JonBenet Ramsey Homicide Web Sites," a page, maintained by one Ken Polzin, Jr., of links to some four dozen other websites pertaining to the case.

Polzin's standard for inclusion is clearly "relevance," not accuracy or even sanity.

His page can take you to MSNBC's search engine, transcripts of press conferences, or a redacted version of the official autopsy report. Or you can just as easily surf right into the "Reverse Speech" site and listen for yourself to the "smoking gun" in the case: snippets from the audiotape of the Ramsey parents' CNN interview played backwards, supplemented with helpful transcripts in case you can't quite make out on your own that John Ramsey's tergiversated voice is in fact saying "I done it. It's a show you're running."

You can almost make a Six-Degrees-of-Kevin-Bacon game of it: how many links does it take to get from the home page of *The New York Times* to, say, a news release announcing authoritatively that "Pressure is growing on Capitol Hill for immediate impeachment hearings on President Clinton and Vice President Gore"? (Or so says the Committee to Impeach the President, which has just doubled its roster of supporters in Congress — to two.) How about a guide to the "hanky code" used by gay men to signal their preferences? (I made each connection in eight links.) But the question remains: how many rushed or inattentive surfers will end up wondering whether *The Denver Post* also has new evidence that Paul McCartney is dead?

◆ **CHURCH AND STATE.** The rules seem to be different for online advertising, too. A survey by the Newspaper Association of America points to a disturbing trend: while no decent newspaper would dream of assigning its metro reporter to write headlines for its advertisers, most of the newspapers with separate new-media staffs routinely ask editorial employees to design or produce banner ads for their websites.

Chris McKenna, a producer for Time Online, says that while her own organization has never asked her to do any business-side work, there does seem to be a sense among many news organizations that all standards are a bit looser online. "Some print media don't seem to take their online sites quite as seriously," she says. "They don't give them enough resources; they might expect a producer, say, to be a researcher and fact-checker and editor, too. It's as if they're saying 'Hey, we can compromise a bit, it's not our flagship product.'"

Andie Tucher is CJR's associate editor.

COVER STORIES/NEW MEDIA

The Netly News, a Pathfinder creation of leading cyber-journalist Josh Quittner. Besides writing provocatively and critically about the evolution of the Internet, Quittner offers a Digital Sandbox, where visitors are invited to play with new technologies and gain first-hand experience.

Salon offers all the traditional intellectual fare of an opinion magazine, plus a meeting place for compelling online discussion as well. Called Table Talk, the discussion zone was inspired by a model developed at "The Well," where the first significant online community was born in the spring of 1985. Salon, as much as any online publication, tries to give its readers that elusive sense of belonging.

One of the most discussed sites is Slate, the Microsoft start-up edited by Michael Kinsley. Heavily promoted, Slate offers a rich set of articles and commentary on culture and politics, such as David Plotz's assessment of "Ralph Reed's Creed," or "Selling Seals of Approval," John Merline's investigation of how companies get charities to endorse their products. But *Slate* doesn't offer many digital bells and whistles, and critics say it does not fully exploit its online capabilities. It is also one the most parodied online literary offerings. One send-up, called Stale (www.stale.com), recently traced the "surprising parallels" between changes in wind patterns and Clinton's electoral popularity.

SPORTS

These sites on the Web may not necessarily raise the journalistic yardstick, but they are compelling because they so effectively exploit the Web's capabilities.

The best overall sports reporting online is at ESPN SportsZone and CBS SportsLine. Both provide immediate coverage of games, after-games-analysis, and much more, from live-game statistics to interactive reader polls to video and audio highlights. Most of this content is free, although more specialized coverage is available for small monthly fees.

The Sports Network runs a distant second to these premier general interest sports services, and adheres to a more traditional approach to sports reporting with fewer interactive online features. *Sports Illustrated's* SI Online provides mostly repackaged content from the magazine, though it had plans to increase

its original content as part of a partnership with CNN starting July 1.

THE ONLINE FUTURE

News content on the Internet has been evolving through three stages. In stage one, which still dominates most news sites, online journalists mostly repurpose content from their mother ship. In stage two, which gained momentum last year and characterizes most of the better news sites, the journalists create original content and augment it with such additives as hyperlinks (with which a reader can instantly access another website); interactive features such as search engines, which seek out material on specific topics; and a degree of customization — the ability to choose what categories of news and information you receive.

Stage three is just beginning to emerge at only a handful of sites. It is characterized by original news content designed specifically for the Web as a new medium of communication. Stage three will be characterized by a willingness to rethink the nature of a "community" online and, most important, a willingness to experiment with new forms of storytelling. Often this is "immersive" storytelling, which allows you to enter and navigate through a news report in ways different from just reading it. Sometimes this might be done through new technology. Just one example: Rob Fixmer, editor of *CyberTimes*, says that *The New York Times* is experimenting with omni-directional imaging, which would permit you to explore a 360-degree field of vision. Such technology will allow viewers the experience of "entering" a live or recorded news event, or to see a still or moving photo in three dimensions.

But the promise of new media is not merely about dazzling technology. Most serious news organizations know that young people are turning to online media.

News organizations know too that audiences for online news in the future will be drawn by a site's unique content and perspective, and by its quality. New media represent the future. For editors and for publishers, a commitment to quality online news today is the best way to ensure that your news organization will be there when the online business matures a decade or more from now. ♦

WHERE TO FIND THEM

URL's of some of the sites mentioned in these stories (with parent company or primary news source listed above):

The Boston Globe
www.boston.com

Business Week
www.businessweek.com

Chicago Tribune
www.chicago.tribune.com

CNN
www.cnn.com

The Dallas Morning News
www.dallasnews.com

Wired
www.hotwired.com

Infoworld
www.infoworld.com

Money magazine
pathfinder.com/money/ or
www.money.com

MSNBC
www.msnbc.com

The McClatchy Newspapers, Inc.
www.nando.net (The Nando Times)

Netly News
www.netlynews.com
(or through www.pathfinder.com)

The New York Times
www.nytimes.com

The Orlando Sentinel
www.orlandosentinel.com

Reuters
www.reuters.com

Salon
www.salon1999.com

San Jose Mercury News
www.mercurycenter.com

Slate
www.slate.com

The Associated Press
wire.ap.org

Time magazine
pathfinder.com/time/ or
www.time.com

The Washington Post
www.washingtonpost.com

News.com:

One Site's Struggle to Stand Out on the Web

by Paul Sagan

It looks and sounds much like any morning story meeting, although this one's at a new-media outfit, news.com. From one side of the table: "I wonder if we can get video" of a news conference about a major new website. Over a speakerphone somebody describes another story, this one from the world of computer code, "about how the C++ development language is holding its own against Java."

The stories produced here aren't for everyone, but a look at news.com, as it strives for credibility, attention, and profits, provides a snapshot of one version of online journalism as it takes shape.

News.com's audience is made up of computer mavens who expect solid, original reporting on information-technology stories. Its editors select more than a dozen stories each morning that will be produced and posted on the Web, then updated for twelve all-news-radio-like deadlines into the evening.

Presiding at the meetings, in a converted loft in the "media gulch" section of San Francisco, is Jai Singh, forty, the soft-spoken editor. A former editor at *Infoworld* and *PC Week* who came to this country at nineteen, Singh leads a staff of thirty-four, including twenty-five reporters and editors, three of them based in Boston, the site's East Coast presence.

When he arrived at news.com's parent company, CNET (pronounced sea-net), in January 1996, Singh says, the company's online news efforts consisted mainly of three people rewriting stories lifted from newspapers. He pushed, successfully, for more original reporting. To get it, he began recruiting experienced journalists from such places as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Los Angeles Daily News*, and *The Associated Press*. Pay starts at around \$25,000, Singh says, but climbs into the \$80,000 range for top editors, plus stock options in CNET.

When it was founded in 1992, CNET

was bent on starting a twenty-four-hour cable TV network devoted to computers and technology, with a modest online component on the side. But things didn't turn out that way. Although CNET does produce three weekly shows for the Sci-Fi cable channel and one weekly syndicated program, the company is better known as a programmer of content for the Web, with cnet.com serving as the "front door" that leads users to news.com and nine other sites, including a game center and a site where users can download free software.

The company went public in July 1996

mid-May include coverage of the launch of ABC News's new website, ABCNews.com, an analysis of rates charged by Bell South for high-speed Internet access, an update on a widely anticipated software release from Netscape, and that feature on C++, which will turn out to be the lead item by 1 P.M.

Christopher Barr, forty-four and CNET's editor-in-chief, says the site's daily story budget was reduced — from forty items to about twenty-five — to allow editors and reporters more time for each piece. "We learned it wasn't about quantity," he says.

The site is striving to build credibility.

Singh says news.com will not run with a story unless it gets confirmation from three sources or a principal. But the site sometimes sidesteps its rule by running items with less-than-full confirmation, in a column called "Rumor Mill."

News.com faces a special challenge in avoiding the appearance of a conflict of interest. Two

major investors in CNET are the Intel Corp. and Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft — all frequent subjects of news.com stories. Site policy is to reveal this whenever it is deemed relevant.

Singh and his staff, meanwhile, are preparing a set of written rules of conduct. Some samples from a draft: accepting junkets from sources is Not O.K. (accepting small gifts is O.K., but probably with a \$25 limit); and owning stock in technology companies is Not O.K. except through a mutual fund. "If there's even a hint of ethical compromise we don't have a business," Singh says. "We all bring our journalism heritage into this."

In print, he notes, "There's *The New York Times* and the *National Enquirer*. It's the same on the Net." He and his crew are counting on discerning readers to appreciate the difference.

Sagan, a co-founder of New York 1 News and the former editor and president of new media at Time Inc., can be reached on the Internet at paul@saganfamily.com.



A news meeting at news.com. From left, Mike Yamamoto, Anthony Lazarus, Jeff Quan, Clair Whitmer.



Jai Singh

with a share price of \$16 and the stock joined the Internet valuation roller coaster, dipping to a low of \$12 shortly after the company began trading to a high of \$32.75 in January. Last December news.com got a big boost when *The Wall Street Journal*'s widely read personal technology columnist, Walter Mossberg, called it "the jewel in CNET's crown." Traffic surged and CNET's share price jumped nearly 15 percent. As of early June, the stock hovered at \$22.50.

In 1995 CNET'S revenues — nearly all from advertising on the Internet and on the television shows — were \$3.5 million, and increased to almost \$15 million in 1996. But annual losses grew too, from \$8.6 million to \$16.9 million. Since the company's founding through the first quarter of this year, CNET has accumulated a deficit of \$42 million. At news.com, at least, the key to reversing those losses is seen as quality reporting and analysis.

Stories chosen at the news meeting in

SOUL SEARCHING

How the Mercury News painfully distanced itself from a big but flawed story

by Pia Hinckle

The events that preceded the publication of the "Dark Alliance" series in the *San Jose Mercury News* last August and that led up to executive editor Jerry Ceppos's unusual mea culpa column about it this May have the elements of a pretty good newspaper movie. There is the aggressive lone-wolf investigative reporter who may or may not have fallen down a reportorial rabbit hole; the young Latina city editor, newly promoted and protective of her star reporter; the thoughtful executive editor struggling with his conscience as parts of a huge "holy shit!" story seem to unravel before his eyes; the racial and social undertones of newsroom politics; plus tales of personal tragedies and professional laxity. The backdrop is the CIA's history and dirty laundry, angry mistrust among some African-Americans about their government, about the injustices of the drug war, and the devastation of inner-city communities from crack.

The movie would be about a newspaper slowly and painfully distancing itself from what it once had seen as one of the bigger and better stories it had done. But getting the plot just right would be tough. The

Pia Hinckle, a 1996-97 Knight-Bagehot Fellow at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, is a former managing editor of The San Francisco Bay Guardian.



Editor Ceppos in the newsroom: "The series did not meet our standards."

details are difficult to put together, partly because after much grandstanding about healthy public debate and openness with readers, the *Mercury News* has gone silent. Ceppos and the editors involved in the contentious story and its internal review all declined to be interviewed. The only person directly involved in the making of it who spoke freely and on the record is Gary Webb, the embattled author.

From another perspective, maybe the story is too mundane for a movie. What happened inside the *Mercury News* during this last year is something like what can and does happen in any number of newsrooms — writers misjudging or exaggerating the portent of their reporting; editors failing to inspect the undergirding of a story's logic; busy executives getting dis-

tracted; editorial systems breaking down. Except that what went wrong in San Jose was so much more damaging, inside and outside the newsroom. And thus worth trying to understand.

The series certainly invited scrutiny. (See "The Furor Over 'Dark Alliance,'" *CJR*, January/February.) Right in its opening sentences it made inflammatory charges:

For the better part of a decade, a Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to a Latin American guerrilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, a *Mercury News* investigation has found. This drug network opened the first pipeline between Colombia's cocaine cartels and the black neighborhoods of Los Angeles, a city now known as the "crack" capital of the world. The cocaine that flooded in helped spark a crack explosion in urban America . . . and provided the cash and connections for L.A.'s gangs to buy automatic weapons.

Similar allegations of contra involvement with inner-city drug dealing had been reported for years. But this was the first time that a major daily had found a small chain of named individuals — three drug dealers, two of them connected to the contras — and drawn such horrifying conclusions.

The reaction in the black neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles was intense and immediate. On August 30, 1996, Maxine Waters, the U.S. congresswoman, wrote Attorney General Janet Reno demanding an investigation so that her crack-ravaged community might "get answers to the many questions that have

in San Jose

been raised by the *San Jose Mercury News* exposé."

In a highly unusual move, CIA Director John Deutch held a community meeting in Watts in November to try to defuse the anger. Debate over the series built up, fanned by attention on the Internet and on talk radio.

On October 4, *The Washington Post* slammed the series in a page-one news piece. On October 13, in reaction to the *Post*'s article, Webb's fellow *Mercury News* investigative reporter, Pete Carey, dissected the series in the pages of the *Merc*. Carey's article confirmed charges raised by critics that Webb had left out some evidence that contradicted one of the story's key sources.

After *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* also ran page-one stories alleging major inaccuracies in the series, Ceppos wrote a lengthy article in November defending it. Staff meetings were held to address newsroom tension. And a steady flow of memos concerning questions about the series' reporting flew back and forth between San Jose and Sacramento, where Webb lives and works, from winter into spring.

At one point, in February, Webb was summoned to San Jose to meet with top *Mercury News* editors to talk once again. "I thought we were finally going to discuss the follow-up," Webb says. "Instead, I got told that we still needed to settle the issues about the series. I said, 'What issues? I thought we already did that.'"

In his celebrated May 11 column, Jerry Ceppos explained to readers that the paper still supports what he sees as the core of the series — that "a drug ring associated with the Contras sold large quantities of cocaine in inner-city Los Angeles in the 1980s at the time of the crack explosion there" and that "some of the drug profits from those sales went to the Contras."

But, he went on: "After spending months reexamining our effort with the help of seven other reporters and editors, I have concluded that the series did not meet our standards in four areas."

- The *Mercury News* "presented only one interpretation of complicated, sometimes-conflicting pieces of evidence."

- "We made our best estimate of how much money was involved, but we failed to label it as an estimate."

- The paper "oversimplified the complex issue of how the crack epidemic in America grew."

- And finally, the *Mercury News* "through imprecise



Reporter Webb: off the assignment

language and graphics," created "impressions that were open to misinterpretation."

One such "impression" was the strong implication that the Central Intelligence Agency knew about the drug dealing. Webb argues that the series never actually says that the CIA knew about that. The paper's own editorial department had the impression that it did. Its editorial on the series was headlined ANOTHER CIA DISGRACE: HELPING THE CRACK FLOW.

In his column, Ceppos conceded: "Although members of the drug ring met with Contra leaders paid by the CIA, I feel that we did not have proof that top CIA officials knew of the relationship. I believe that part of our contract with readers is to be as clear about what we don't know as what we do know." He noted that reporter Webb does not agree with his conclusions about the series.

Webb was surprised and angered by the column — "I told them, everyone who wants this story to die will read this as a retraction." *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* both ran front-page stories covering the *Merc*'s second thoughts, as well as editorials that praised Ceppos for "repudiating" the series, as the *Post* editorial put it.

Ceppos's column may have little effect on anti-government sentiment in segments of the black community. "There is a lot of suspicion that there is some truth associated with the claims in the story," Los Angeles city councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas told *Time*. "Frankly, these suspicions will not go away."

TIMELINE

1996

March Webb files "Dark Alliance" series with editor Dawn Garcia. Managing editor David Yarnold oversees project.

July Yarnold leaves *Mercury News*. Assistant managing editor Paul Van Slambrouck takes over.

August 18-20 *Mercury News* publishes the series, followed by an editorial: "Another CIA Disgrace: Helping the Crack Flow."

August-September Paper publicizes series on website and through Webb's media interviews. Senators Boxer, Feinstein, Representative Waters call for government investigations.

October 4 *The Washington Post* runs piece slamming "Dark Alliance."

October 10 Ceppos's memo criticizes in-house "Dark Alliance" critics for gloating over *Post* story.

October 13 *Mercury News* publishes reporter Pete Carey's analysis of the *Post*'s attack.

October 14 First staff meeting on "Dark Alliance."

October 18 *Mercury News* publishes Ceppos's letter to *The Washington Post* in strong defense of the series. The *Post* had refused to print it.

October 20-22 The *Los Angeles Times* publishes three-part series highly critical of "Dark Alliance."

October 21 *The New York Times* publishes its critique of "Dark Alliance."

October Committee forms to examine editing procedures.

October 29-November 8 Webb goes to Central America to investigate "Dark Alliance" leads.

November 3 *Mercury News* publishes article by Ceppos discussing the media controversy. He still defends the series.

1997

January-February Webb files four follow-up stories; none run.

February Webb attends three meetings with editors in San Jose concerning "Dark Alliance." He is allowed to keep working on the story.

March Webb goes to Nicaragua on vacation time.

May Staff meets to discuss Ceppos's coming column.

May 11 *Mercury News* runs Ceppos's mea culpa.

June 5 Webb is transferred from the investigative beat to spot news.

The CIA said its own investigation of the charges would be completed by the end of the year. The Justice Department and two congressional committees have also said they would look into the charges.

If Webb was surprised by Ceppos's column, many of his colleagues were not. Inside the San Jose newsroom, Webb's series had become controversial soon after he filed it, in March 1996. Word got around about "Gary's cocaine story" after several reporters sneaked unauthorized reads of it from the central computer system. Some thought it might give the *Merc* a chance at its third Pulitzer, but many others could not believe the paper would publish something that they thought read like a conspiracy manifesto.

It didn't help Webb's case in the newsroom that quite a few reporters and editors at the *Mercury News* see him as an arrogant reporter who is given too much freedom by management despite "problems" with his stories. In one such problem, according to *The New York Times*, the *Mercury News* assigned a second reporter to check out Webb's 1994 series about the alleged failures of Tandem Computers, Inc. to modernize state motor vehicle computers. The reporter wrote in a memo that Webb's series was, "in all its major ele-

ments, incorrect." But others at the *Merc* say at least some of the disputed elements of that story were seen, in time, as on target. The paper never ran a correction.

Not many journalists at the *Mercury News* really know Webb, who works out of his home in Sacramento and the *Merc*'s three-person bureau there, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from San Jose. In his nearly ten years at the paper he has had minimal contact with San Jose.

He had a similar investigative position at *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland before being recruited by Jonathan Krim, the *Mercury News*'s assistant managing editor for projects, in 1988. As *The New York Times* reported, Webb was sued for libel three times at *The Plain Dealer*. One suit was dismissed. The paper settled the other two.

Over the years he has won more than two dozen journalism awards, including the 1996 Journalist of the Year award from the Society of Professional Journalists Northern California Chapter for his work on "Dark Alliance," and the 1994 H.L. Mencken award from the Free Press Association for his series on drug forfeiture laws. He was also part of the six-person *Mercury News* team that won a 1990 Pulitzer for its coverage of the 1989 San Francisco earthquake.

And he has his backers. "I'm seeing Gary being made out to be a pariah and I just don't get it," says Tim Graham, editor of *The Oakland Tribune*, who has known Webb for nineteen years. "He is one of the finest and most aggressive reporters around and he is also always in need of a strong editor — what's wrong with that? The editors are supposed to be the gatekeepers."

According to Webb and other *Mercury News* reporters, the normal editing process for an investigative project requires a reporter to work closely with an assistant city editor who then turns over the story to a senior editor, usually projects editor Krim, for a second read and edit. Once these three people have all signed off on the story, it goes to the managing editor or executive editor for final approval and then to lawyers if the subject matter warrants. "Dark Alliance" followed a somewhat different route.

Webb's frontline editor and main San Jose contact is city editor Dawn Garcia. She had come south in 1993 from the rival *San Francisco Chronicle*, where she covered city politics, after a stint as a John S. Knight fellow at Stanford. Garcia rose quickly at the *Merc*, moving from state editor to city editor in May 1996. Some

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saw her as having bypassed a more experienced editor, a white male, and thus something of an affirmative-action-backlash cloud hung over the internal debate on "Dark Alliance."

Webb's next line of editing on the series came from David Yarnold, a *Mercury News* veteran who rose from the graphics department to become managing editor when Ceppos was promoted to executive editor in 1995. Several staff members note that projects editor Krim, who has a reputation as a tough and thorough editor, particularly on investigative projects, would normally oversee a complicated series like "Dark Alliance." But for reasons not altogether clear, Krim was not involved in the editing. Insiders say that management seemed to want to spread the chance to work on major projects to other top editors. In any event, Yarnold took an interest in "Dark Alliance," and it was soon known as "Yarnold's baby."

For four months, Garcia and Yarnold worked on shaping Webb's long and complex stories into a series. Then, about a month before publication, Yarnold left the paper to go to corporate parent Knight-Ridder's new-media department in San Jose. He would return to his position at the

Mercury News in April 1997, eight months after "Dark Alliance" was published. Paul Van Slambrouck, assistant managing editor for news, stepped in to fill Yarnold's shoes both as acting managing editor and senior "Dark Alliance" editor. Van Slambrouck decided to re-edit the entire series. He later told staff members that he "toned it down."

How much sustained attention the people responsible for "Dark Alliance" were actually able to give it is open to question. Garcia's promotion meant that she was supervising about forty reporters instead of seven. She was also struggling with a recently reorganized metro section that left fewer reporters to fill the same space. Yarnold, criticized behind his back for his background in graphics but respected as a good administrator, was managing editor for a newsroom of about three hundred people, as was Van Slambrouck when he filled Yarnold's shoes.

Much was happening during the editing in the personal lives of some of the players as well. Garcia was going through a divorce. Ceppos was quietly getting medical tests that would confirm that he had prostate cancer.

Webb says he doesn't know whether the story went to the papers' lawyers. And

whether Ceppos read it before publication is also unclear. Webb, again, says he doesn't know. Sources close to management say that if the managing editor has already read a series, then Ceppos might not read it himself if he is too busy.

As Webb sees it, the editing process was "more intense than what I usually get. It basically got edited twice," going from four parts to three, then back to four, then back to three. He argues that the criticisms of the 400-inch series that were warranted stem from a lack of space. "We didn't detail some stuff very well," he admits, "specifically regarding the money trail and specifically regarding the genesis of the crack market in LA." He says that when he raised that concern, his editors told him that he had made his case.

When the series finally saw ink last August, the newsroom divided roughly into two camps: those who believed that regardless of its flaws, the series was significant, and those who thought it was a one-sided conspiracy theory from a cowboy reporter. To some extent the split fell along lines of who tended to be critical of management and who didn't, but it also tended to break along ethnic and gender lines. "The 'sup-

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porters,' the people who believed aspects of the theories, were mostly women and ethnic minorities, while the opposition was led by what I guess you could call the 'angry white guys,'" says Ricardo Sandoval, Mexico correspondent for the *Mercury News*, who was in the San Jose newsroom through most of the controversy. "It really reflected the division in the public at large." Several other staffers also confirmed this characterization.

When the *Washington Post* story ran October 4, the level of gloating by what some staff members were calling the "Dark Alliance Nazis" got so high that executive editor Ceppos wrote a two-page memo October 10 calling for dialogue and inviting everyone to a "brown-bag" to talk the situation over. The memo said:

Everybody: Many of you have been talking about the *Washington Post's* reporting on our 'Dark Alliance' series. A copy of the letter that I've written to the Post is attached. In brief, it says that no one — including the Post — has proven that our conclusions were wrong. It says that we strongly support the conclusions that the series drew — and will until someone proves them wrong . . . There are papers famous for their back-stabbing environment (when Woodward and Bernstein first broke Watergate, the Post

newsroom sounded much like ours does now, only worse). I tell applicants that, at the *Mercury News*, our goal is to become famous for dealing with tough situations in a much healthier fashion.

Ceppos is big on dialogue, and he got it. At staff meetings in October and again in May, some employees expressed deep frustration and anger. "If I had done what Gary did I would be fired," one staffer said during the May meeting. "Why is he still working here?" Another said that the series had "shamed" everyone at the paper.

Ceppos announced in October that Jonathan Krim would be heading a "projects committee" to scrutinize the editorial process and make recommendations for improvements in handling special projects. The goal, says committee member Stephen Buel, an assistant editor and an outspoken critic of "Dark Alliance," "was to make sure that something like this doesn't happen again." Other committee members concur.

In a preliminary five-page memo, the committee concluded that "We believe the newspaper needs a more formal process for vetting projects — at the idea stage and at the editing stage." The committee's recommendations, written by Krim, include a much more formal review of special projects from beginning to end.

Once a project has been edited . . . at least three other people will formally review the story. These three will be the AME Projects or AME News; a reporter or editor who knows something about the subject area, and the ME or EE . . . Stories whose original editor is one of the people involved in the process still will be reviewed by three other people.

That is still fewer people than at some papers. "The stuff that happened in San Jose would never happen here," says Jim Mulvaney, speaking as projects editor at *The Orange County Register*. "There are always reporters who push the envelope and it is the editors' jobs to pull them back." Mulvaney, who moved in June to the New York *Daily News*, says the *Register* has at least five editors read any major investigation, at least one of whom comes to the story cold.

In his May 11 column, Ceppos said "Dark Alliance" would be edited differently today: "It would state fewer conclusions as certainties, and be clearer in examining why, given the thicket of sometimes conflicting evidence . . . we drew the conclusions that we did."

While the projects committee was at work, another committee was doing its own assessment of "Dark Alliance," one

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that would lead to Ceppos's May 11 column. Meanwhile, Webb and two other experienced reporters were working on follow-up stories to the series.

Back in October, Webb says, he was offered three book deals and one movie deal for the series. But he contends Ceppos told him he couldn't do those projects and still follow the story for the *Mercury News*, which, Webb says, Ceppos wanted him to do. In late October and early November, "I went down to Central America to follow up the CIA and the money angles." He worked with a Managua-based free-lance journalist, Georg Hodel, who has helped Webb with his Central America reporting. "We came up with some great stuff," he says. "If anything, I feel better about the series now than when we ran it. We didn't know how right we were."

In January, Webb claims, management seemed eager to get these stories into the paper, "because they wanted to shut *The Washington Post* up." Webb says he filed four stories in January and February, one 130 inches long, another 220 inches, and two 50 to 60 inches. None of the follow-ups ever ran.

Sources close to management say that

the four stories have indeed been filed, but that they are not the nails in the CIA's coffin that Webb sometimes makes them out to be. According to one person who read them, they have some very promising information, most of which is buried deep in long, rambling articles that need lots of editing. During one March meeting Webb attended with top editors, he says, Ceppos told him that they were not going to run his stories. "I got very agitated. I said, 'This is outrageous.'" But Webb claims that Garcia later told him that it was her intention to make sure they got into the paper.

Earlier in March, Webb had gone to interview another source in Florida and then took vacation time to go to Managua, Nicaragua, for more interviews with people allegedly familiar with contra drug deals — despite having been told by Paul Van Slambrouck to come back to "settle this other stuff first," meaning the questions still open about his series. Webb says the trip resulted in "some amazing interviews with these people, but nobody was very interested. They never asked for notes or anything."

In late May, Webb told *CJR* that he had had no communication with anyone in San Jose except Garcia since March: "Total silence." He said that no one had given him a copy of the projects memo yet and wasn't sure how or if he would be affected by it. He said he would keep researching his leads to follow-up "Dark Alliance" until somebody in San Jose told him to stop.

On Wednesday, June 4, somebody did. Ceppos called Webb and took him off the story. Webb said he was invited to drive to San Jose the next day to "discuss my future at the paper." There, Ceppos told him that he would be transferred from the state capital to Cupertino, and out of investigative work. Webb said he would fight his job change through the Guild. Yarnold and Garcia remain in the same positions; Van Slambrouck was promoted June 11 to deputy managing editor.

Ceppos also told Webb that another reporter would follow up "Dark Alliance" for the *Mercury News*, Webb says, but he isn't holding his breath. "I think that Ceppos's column is the last time that this story will ever go in the *Mercury*. I mean, when they put it up in the website as an 'epilogue,' that's a pretty clear sign." ♦

National Arts Journalism Program **najp**

Supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Arts Journalism Program awards mid-career and senior fellowships to journalists specializing in arts and culture. The program is based at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, in association with the School of the Arts.

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THE 1997-98 CLASS of FELLOWS

U-TURN ON MEMORY LANE

by Mike Stanton

Pamela Freyd seems more like the mother and grandmother she is than a revolutionary. But as a founder of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, she has in fact helped revolutionize the way the press and the public view one of the angriest debates in America — whether an adult can suddenly remember long-forgotten childhood abuse.

The subject of memory has always been a slippery one for journalists. While there is a documented body of knowledge showing that people can forget horrific events and recall them years later, memory is not an exact science like nuclear physics, but rather an emotional arena of violent disagreement.

Yet in the 1980s and early '90s, repressed memories were all the rage among reporters and talk-show hosts as the media uncritically focused on accounts of abuse so dramatic and terrible that they must have been true. Some, it eventually became clear, were exaggerations or fabrications.

Now, thanks largely to the efforts of the Philadelphia-based False Memory Syndrome Foundation, the pendulum has swung equally far in the other direction. Formed as a support group for accused parents, the foundation has sought primarily to persuade the media of the dangers of psychotherapy in creating "false memories." Indeed, today there is open skepticism and outright hostility toward the idea that lost memory can be recovered. But often there has been no more hard-news reporting than before, leaving the issue essentially unexplicated in the press.

Mike Stanton heads the investigative team at The Providence Journal-Bulletin, where he shared a 1994 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. He wrote a 1995 series on Professor Ross E. Cheit of Brown University, whose recovered memory of childhood abuse drew national attention. Stanton studied recovered memory last year on a John S. Knight Fellowship at Stanford University.

A study published last year by a University of Michigan sociologist, Katherine Beckett, found a sharp shift in how four leading magazines — *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *People* — treated sexual abuse. In 1991, more than 80 percent of the coverage was weighted toward stories of survivors, with recovered memory taken for granted and questionable therapy virtually ignored. By 1994, more than 80 percent of the coverage focused on false accusations, often involving supposedly false memory. Beckett credited the False Memory Syndrome Foundation with a major role in the change.

Pamela Freyd (rhymes with "tried") started the foundation in early 1992 with her husband, Peter, a University of Pennsylvania mathematician. He had been accused by their grown daughter Jennifer, a respected University of Oregon psychologist and memory researcher, of childhood sexual abuse, the memory of which she said she recovered as an adult. Since then, journalists across the country have felt the wrath of what Stephen Fried, a writer for *Philadelphia* magazine, calls "the most influentially dysfunctional family in America."

It wasn't Jennifer Freyd, but her parents, who made her allegations public. Pamela Freyd revealed the accusations, which neither she nor her daughter has ever specified publicly, along with personal details about her daughter's life, in an article that she wrote anonymously for a small journal sympathetic to accused parents. She later identified herself to reporters as the author.

The Freyds blame their daughter's therapist for her memories of abuse. But Jennifer Freyd denies that her memories surfaced, as newspaper articles and her mother have suggested, through hypnosis or any of the other therapeutic practices the FMSF attacks.

Rarely has such a strange and little-understood organization had such a profound effect on media coverage of such a contro-



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versial matter. The foundation is an aggressive, well-financed p.r. machine adept at manipulating the press, harassing its critics, and mobilizing a diverse army of psychiatrists, outspoken academics, expert defense witnesses, litigious lawyers, Freud bashers, critics of psychotherapy, and devastated parents. With a budget of \$750,000 a year from members and outside supporters, the foundation's reach far exceeds its actual membership of about 3,000. The Freyds and the members know who we are, but the press knows less than it realizes about who they are, what drives them, or why they've been so successful.

Pamela Freyd, who is the foundation's executive director, wrote in its first monthly newsletter, "We had to find ways to get people to hear our story." From the beginning, she encouraged accused parents to tell their stories to reporters and to appear on talk shows, to put a human face on this "serious health crisis" and satisfy the media's "craving for human drama."

It worked. As controversial memory cases arose around the country, FMSF boosters contacted journalists to pitch the false-memory argument, more and more reporters picked up on the issue, and the foundation became an overnight media darling. The story line that had dominated the press since the 1980s — an underreported toll of sexual abuse, including sympathetic stories of adult survivors resurrecting long-lost memories of it — was quickly turned around. The focus shifted to new tearful victims — respectable, elderly parents who could no longer see their children and grandchildren because of bad therapists who

implanted memories not only of sexual abuse but also of such bizarre things as satanic cults, past lives, and alien abductions.

In fact, there was irresponsible therapy being practiced, people did concoct memories of things that never happened, and frightening lawsuits devastated those falsely accused. Such cases were covered with great zeal.

But the reporters who rushed to explore the Freyds' juicy new angle ignored equally essential facts — for example, that there is no way to document the prevalence of bad therapy versus good therapy, or of true memories versus false memories, and that it is nearly impossible to know whether the accused parents, the Freyds included, are telling the truth. The foundation is part of a larger movement that questions the recent increase in sexual-abuse allegations, not only by adults claiming recovered

memory but also by children who, sometimes under coercive questioning, produce lurid accusations involving their parents or day-care personnel and adult "sex rings."

Within six months of the foundation's creation, so many positive stories had appeared that Pamela Freyd wrote in her newsletter: "The biggest change has come in the press. One year ago there was literally nothing written about FMSF (indeed, it did not even have a name). There are now many well-documented professional and popular articles about FMSF."

By the end of 1993, Pamela Freyd reported that media cover-

Why the press changed course on whether lost memories of childhood abuse can be recovered

Peter and Pamela Freyd started their foundation to tell their side of the story and to satisfy the media's "craving for human drama"

age had changed public attitudes toward false memory, and that news articles "are the primary vehicle for the dissemination of information." And "false memory syndrome" — a catchy slogan invented by the Freyds but not scientifically accepted — became implanted in our collective consciousness, complete with its own heading in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*.

Many reporters don't realize that the FMSF's impressive array of scientific advisers represents just one part of the broad spectrum of psychological thought. The board is dominated by research psychologists and biologically oriented therapists — inclined to seek physical reasons for problems and treat them with drugs — along with older, psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists. There are few younger female therapists.

The two most prominent FMSF experts, who pop up repeatedly in news articles and as consulting witnesses in lawsuits, are a University of Washington psychologist, Elizabeth Loftus, and a University of California at Berkeley sociologist and cult specialist, Richard Ofshe. While both have done work and published books that are an important part of the recovered-memory debate, too many reporters accept their theories uncritically, seemingly unaware that there are countering scientific views or that neither's expertise is in traumatic memory.

As the story unfolded in the '90s, reporters relied increasingly on FMSF experts and propaganda. A November 29, 1993 *Time* article by Leon Jaroff — who calls himself *Time*'s longtime "resident skeptic" — quoted several foundation advisers and conveyed the impression that "literally thousands" of people were coming forward with false memories induced by therapists. Jaroff says he was introduced to the topic by another FMSF adviser, Martin Gardner, who was active in another group that Jaroff helped found, the Committee for the Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. The committee debunks all forms of "quackery," says Jaroff, from flying saucers to recovered



Jennifer Freyd

AP/WIDEWORLD PHOTOS/TIM KASS

memory. "As a journalist you have to write a balanced story, but within reason," he says. "You have to make a judgment. I'm convinced that so-called 'recovered memory' is largely illusory." The FMSF hailed the *Time* piece as "a landmark in public awareness."

Even earlier, in a July 21, 1992, *New York Times* story, the science writer Daniel Goleman, a psychologist, became one of the first journalists to pop-

ularize the foundation's contention that accusations based on recovered memories were modern-day witch-hunts. The article opened with the question "Is it Satan or Salem?" and the witch-hunt metaphor proved irresistible for other reporters. But Goleman failed to consider that the FMSF might represent an alternative witch-hunt — a backlash by a society fed up with celebrity incest survivors like Oprah and Roseanne and a culture of victimization. His story did not make clear the role of accused parents in starting the foundation, quoted several of its advisers without revealing their affiliation, and misidentified Pamela Freyd as a psychologist.

Major series on false memory appeared in *The San Diego Union-Tribune* in the fall of 1992 and the *San Francisco Examiner* in the spring of 1993. The *San Diego* series presented as typical of this new hysteria the bizarre case of a woman who claimed a memory from the womb of her mother trying to abort her. The six-day *Examiner* series devoted reams of copy to the emotional but unverified tales of accused parents, but quoted only one alleged victim. The series provoked an outraged response from many therapists and women's and survivors' groups. The foundation, in its next newsletter, eagerly advertised reprints of the *Examiner* series "that has created such a stir across the country."

Highly publicized cases provided reporters with grist for the mill. In 1991, a California wine executive, Gary Ramona, sued his daughter's therapists over her claims of recovered memory of sexual abuse and ultimately won a landmark malpractice case. (The daughter is

now suing Ramona for the cost of her therapy and for punitive damages.) In 1993, Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago was accused in a lawsuit of having molested a young man some years earlier; the man later said his memories were unreliable and withdrew his suit. The incident provoked a wave of indignant columns and a move in the Illinois legislature to ban recovered-memory suits.

The recovered-memory debate sprawls into legal cases beyond sexual abuse. In 1995, the nation's only murder conviction based primarily on a recovered memory was overturned. The suspect, a former firefighter in San Mateo, California, George Franklin, was freed after evidence emerged that his daughter, who had testified against him in his 1990 trial, lied when she denied that she had remembered the murder while under hypnosis. Testimony derived from hypnosis is inadmissible under California law.

The case of Paul Ingram, a Washington state sheriff's deputy and fundamentalist Christian who confessed to recovered memories of molesting his daughters and satanic ritual abuse, became the focal point of a two-part series by Lawrence Wright in *The New Yorker* in the spring of 1993. The articles, which won a National Magazine Award and were published as the book *Remembering Satan*, attracted widespread attention to the phenomenon of false memory while virtually ignoring the many documented instances of recovered memory.

Wright made a compelling case that Ingram confessed to many of his crimes after coercive questioning by the police and his minister. But then, relying on the controversial theories of the prominent FMSF experts Loftus and Ofshe and with no real documentation, Wright said Ingram was representative of "thousands of other people across the country who have been accused on the basis of recovered memories." He added, "Perhaps some of these memories are real; certainly many are false."

The foundation received an even bigger boost with the airing of the 1995 PBS *Frontline* documentary "Divided Memories," produced by Ofra Bikel. A watershed media event in the recovered-memory debate, "Divided Memories" purported to be a balanced examination of the issue and, to uninformed viewers, seemed to summarize where the matter stands today. In truth, it was a four-hour

polemic, including an interview with the Freyds, that gave short shrift to confirmed cases of recovered memory. The program spent most of its time skewering fringe therapists who helped patients recover memories — with *Frontline* cameras rolling — of satanic abuse, past lives, and, in one case, being stuck in a fallopian tube. The documentary ignited an angry firestorm among therapists, medical experts, and groups representing women and survivors of sexual abuse.

Sherry Quirk, president of the American Coalition for Abuse Awareness, wrote to *Frontline* to express outrage “at the heavily weighted slant you have given a subject which is

‘The biggest change has come in the press,’ Pamela Freyd wrote with satisfaction

already sinking under the weight of confusion and misinformation.” A Harvard psychiatrist, Bessel A. van der Kolk, a leading memory expert interviewed by Bikel, wrote to accuse her of glossing over the intricacies of trauma and memory and ignoring national figures documenting the magnitude of sexual abuse. The U.S. Department of Justice’s bureau of justice statistics estimates that 250,000 children a year are sexually molested.

Bikel says she and her researchers looked at hundreds of cases, but could find just one corroborated instance of recovered memory, mentioned briefly near the start of the four-hour documentary. But Ross Cheit, a Brown University professor of public policy who confirmed his own recovered memories of abuse by obtaining a tape-recorded confession from the perpetrator, assigned one of his students to look through electronic databases. In just a few hours, Cheit wrote PBS, the student turned up six cases of recovered memory that were verified by confessions or testimony from other victims. Bikel and her researchers, in fact,

knew about Cheit’s own case, and another involving a woman who successfully sued her father based on a recovered memory, but did not include their stories. Bikel says she didn’t feel their cases were relevant.

Some press critics raved about “Divided Memories.” *The Wall Street Journal*’s Dorothy Rabinowitz, a Pulitzer Prize finalist last year for her columns questioning sexual-abuse accusations by children in day-care cases, called Bikel’s work “grimly captivating, occasionally hilarious, plainly masterful” — “a killer assault” of “extraordinary texture” that “deserves all the awards around.” The FMSF was pleased with the results. The documentary, says Peter Freyd, was “openly an advocate for our side.”

“Divided Memories” capped a sensational run for the foundation. By the end of 1994, more than 300 articles had been published on “false memory,” with headlines like “Beware the Incest-Survivor Machine” (*The New York Times Book Review* on several books dealing with recovered memory) and “Cry Incest” (*Playboy*). Even the comic strip *Doonesbury* joined in: Mark the disc jockey underwent “on-air repressed-memory-hypnosis therapy” by a “leading guru for the recovered-memory movement,” who attempted to induce memories of space-alien abduction.

In her study of the four news-magazines’ pendulum-swing on coverage of sexual abuse, Katherine Beckett noted that the foundation has been “particularly successful” in redefining the issue of child abuse, adding, “The success stems, in part, from the fact that the FMSF identified influencing media coverage as its most important objective.”

The FMSF builds much of its case against recovered memory by attacking a generally discredited Freudian concept of repression that proponents of recovered memory don’t buy, either. In so doing, the foundation ignores the fifty-year-old literature on traumatic, or psychogenic, amnesia, which is an accepted diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association. In his 1996 book *Searching for Memory*, the Harvard psychologist and brain researcher Daniel L. Schacter — who believes that both true and false memories exist — says there is no conclusive scientific evidence that false memories can be created. The FMSF acknowledges that it’s impossible to distinguish true memories from false ones,

but then dismisses incontrovertible cases like Ross Cheit’s as aberrations. The foundation and its backers “remind me of a high school debate team,” says the Stanford psychiatrist David Spiegel, an authority on traumatic amnesia. “They go to the library, surgically extract the information convenient to them and throw out the rest.”

A *Harvard Law Review* article in January 1996 argued that while scientific evidence proves the existence of delayed memories, biased reporting has helped create a social climate in which people, including some judges, have come to believe just the opposite. “Stories highlighting dubious-sounding or clearly mistaken memories have replaced reports of more plausible recollections,” two Northwestern University law professors, Cynthia Grant Brown and Elizabeth Mertz, wrote in the *Review*. “The abusive parents of earlier media accounts have been replaced as the villains of the story by self-serving therapists,” they said, and wondered “why it is apparently so difficult to contemplate the obvious but more complicated possibility that there are both accurate and inaccurate claims of remembered sexual abuse. . . . To the degree that the media has an effect on public opinion,

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including legal professionals' opinions, there is cause to doubt that the public is hearing this more balanced message."

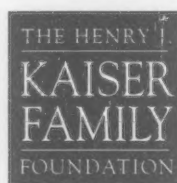
A reporter making an honest effort to tell both sides finds it difficult to penetrate a world where many victims are reluctant to surrender their privacy. Instead of digging the story out for themselves, reporters take a soft-news approach — just as many did earlier with implausible stories of victimization — and allow themselves to be swayed by tearful parents, leaving the FMSF to package the hard news in a slick press kit.

It's surprising how few stories explore the question whether accused parents are

guilty or innocent. The foundation's own survey of member families indicated that 11 percent had been accused by more than one child and that, of a smaller sample that took a lie-detector test, 14 percent failed and another 11 percent declined to disclose the results.

Many therapists, like their patients, hesitate to speak out. Recently, though, they have begun to make a more concerted effort to mobilize a response. One of the most outspoken critics of the false-memory movement is a Seattle therapist, David Calof, editor until last year of *Treating Abuse Today*, a newsletter for

therapists. He has identified what he calls the movement's political agenda — lobbying for more restrictive laws governing therapy and promoting the harassment of therapists through lawsuits and even picketing of their offices and homes. Calof himself has been the target of picketing so fierce that he has been in and out of Seattle courtrooms over the last two years, obtaining restraining orders. He was spending so much time and money fighting the FMSF supporters' campaign against him, he says, that he was forced to stop publishing the newsletter last year. He recently donated the publication to a victims' rights group in Pennsylvania,



Announces THE KAISER MEDIA INTERNSHIPS IN URBAN HEALTH REPORTING FOR 1997

An internship program for young minority journalists interested in specializing in urban public health reporting

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is again sponsoring summer internships, starting June 1997, at six major metropolitan newspapers and at three local television stations, for young minority journalists interested in reporting on urban public health issues. The interns are selected by the newspapers/TV stations.

The nine 1997 Kaiser Media Interns and their host newspapers/TV stations are:

Mohamad Bazzi — *The Washington Post*
Erika Chavez — *The Oregonian*
Jessi de la Cruz — *The Detroit Free Press*
James Hill — *WAGA-5, Atlanta*
Tomoko Hosaka — *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
Laura Lane — *The Dallas Morning News*
Erin McKinney — *KTVI-2, St. Louis*
Camille Mojica — *The San Jose Mercury News*
Erika Dawn Randle — *KDFW-4, Dallas*

The Kaiser Internship Program provides an initial week-long briefing on urban public health issues and health reporting at the National Press Foundation in Washington, D.C. Interns are then based for ten weeks at their newspaper/TV station, typically under the direction of the Health or Metro Editor/News Director, where they report on health issues. The program ends with a 3-day meeting and site visits in Boston. Interns receive a 12-week stipend and travel expenses. The aim is to provide young journalists or journalism college graduates with an in-depth introduction to and practical experience on the specialist health beat.

To apply for the 1998 program, write to:

Penny Duckham
Executive Director, Kaiser Media Fellowships Program
Kaiser Family Foundation
2400 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025

The Kaiser Family Foundation is an independent health care philanthropy and is not affiliated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries.

A Frontline documentary was "openly an advocate for our side," says Peter Freyd

which has resurrected it as *Trauma*. The new publisher says that he views part of its mission as reporting on FMSF, since the mainstream media don't.

Among journalists, perhaps the most relentless critic of the foundation is Michele Landsberg, a *Toronto Star* columnist. In 1993, she says, an Ontario couple, claiming to have been falsely accused, contacted her and asked her to write about their case. Unconvinced, she declined, and eventually started writing instead about the foundation. She attacked its scientific claims and criticized the sensational media coverage. She described how a foundation scientific adviser, Harold Merskey, had testified that a woman accusing a doctor of sexual abuse in a civil case might in fact have been suffering from false memory syndrome. But the accused doctor himself had previously confessed to criminal charges of abusing her.

Landsberg also challenged the credentials of other foundation advisers. She noted that one founding adviser, Ralph Underwager, was forced to resign from the foundation's board after he and his wife, Hollida Wakefield, who remains an adviser, gave an interview to a Dutch pedophilia magazine in which he was quoted as

OPINION

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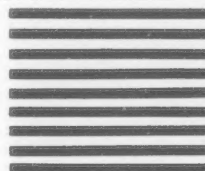
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describing pedophilia as "an acceptable expression of God's will for love." Landsberg also wrote that another adviser, James Randi, a magician known as The Amazing Randi, had been involved in a lawsuit in which his opponent introduced a tape of sexually explicit telephone conversations Randi had with teenage boys. (Randi has claimed at various times, she said, that the tape was a hoax and that the police asked him to make it.)

"Why haven't reporters investigated the False Memory Syndrome Foundation?" she asks. "It's legitimate to examine their backgrounds — here are people who really do have powerful motivation to deny the truth."

Last year, a free-lance writer, Katy Butler, learned what can happen when a journalist crosses swords with the foundation. Butler, who covered the Ramona trial for the *Los Angeles Times* and is a consulting editor for *Family Therapy Networker* magazine, was asked by *Newsweek* to write a story assessing the backlash against recovered memory, including the role of the FMSF. The foundation got wind of the assignment and swung into action. The Freyds, unhappy that her previous articles had challenged foundation assertions, complained to *Newsweek* editors that Butler was biased. Peter Freyd also enlisted Richard Ofshe and another foundation adviser, Frederick Crews, a retired professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley.

Ofshe had been unhappy with Butler over her partly negative review in the *Los Angeles Times* of his book *Making Monsters*. He wrote a letter to *Newsweek's* editor-in-chief, Richard Smith, calling Butler "a zealot masquerading as a journalist." Crews has written harsh articles for the *New York Review of Books*, in which he combines attacks on Freud with efforts to discredit recovered memory. He contends that there are "hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions" of questionable allegations based on recovered memory. Butler, he warned *Newsweek* in a letter, is "well known not only as a journalist in this area but also as a strong advocate" for recovered memory.

The FMSF correspondents say they were seeking accuracy, not censorship. A *Newsweek* senior editor, John Capouya, viewed their letters as "a well-organized action" to block the story or at least discredit Butler. Ultimately, the foundation's

opposition helped persuade *Newsweek* not to do the story. Says Capouya, "We weren't too sanguine about getting into a huge pissing match with these people."

While the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and its claims warrant more press scrutiny, *Philadelphia* magazine's Fried argues that critics should not demonize the group for simply being effective advocates. It's the media's job, he told an Investigative Reporters and Editors conference in Providence last summer, to present a more intelligent, balanced discourse on recovered memory. As Butler, who was a panelist at the IRE ses-

sion, says: "I've worked very hard to tell both sides of this story. What's interesting to me about all this is that telling both sides has started to seem like a dangerous and risky act."

The best a reporter can do in such circumstances is to be a reporter. Don't be seduced by people who cry or experts claiming to have all the answers. Resist the temptation to think you can solve the mystery of memory; embrace the virtues of subtlety and ambiguity.

This is a story with many voices beyond the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. All of them need to be heard. ♦



Announces THE KAISER MEDIA FELLOWS IN HEALTH FOR 1997

Six journalists have been selected as 1997 Kaiser Media fellows:

Debra Gordon, medical writer, *The Virginian-Pilot*

Project: Community coalitions—tracking grass root efforts to address child and maternal health problems

Jon Hamilton, freelance health policy writer

Project: An in-depth look at states that have implemented experimental Medicaid managed care programs

Leslie Laurence, syndicated health columnist, and writer, *Glamour* magazine

Project: The impact of urban hospital closings on local communities

Christopher Ringwald, demographics and mental health reporter,

The Times Union (Albany, NY)

Project: The challenges and debate facing alcoholism and addiction treatment programs—what works, why, and how to measure results

Joanne Silbner, health policy correspondent, National Public Radio

Project: How public health research becomes health policy—from academia to the streets

Tammie Smith, health reporter, *The Tennessean*

Project: How the major black medical colleges in the U.S. are faring in a changing health care environment—focused on Howard, Meharry, Morehouse, and Drew

In 1998, the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program will again award up to six fellowships to print, television and radio journalists and editors interested in health policy, healthcare financing and public health issues. Applications for the 1998 program will be available shortly, for submission by March 1998. The aim is to provide journalists with a highly flexible range of opportunities to pursue individual projects, combined with group briefings and site visits on a wide range of health and social policy issues.

For more information, or to apply for the 1998 awards, write to:

Penny Duckham
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2400 Sand Hill Road
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YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

"Portability" and other media myths about a health-care bill

by Trudy Lieberman

At a news conference in January, President Clinton declared proudly that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, better known as Kennedy-Kassebaum, "made it legal" for unemployed people and those changing jobs "to carry their insurance with them." Reporters didn't challenge his remarks or venture a single follow-up question, just as they didn't dispute similar assertions made last year when the bill, hailed as the best the country could do, wound its way through Congress.

The bill was named for its Senate sponsors, Democrat Edward Kennedy and Republican Nancy Kassebaum, now retired, and its health insurance provisions take effect July 1. Employees who think they can take their insurance to new jobs are in for a shock: they can't, despite what the media have told them.

After the resounding failure of the Clinton administration's effort at a sweeping overhaul of American health care, Kennedy-Kassebaum was meant to address one much-publicized aspect of the problem: making sure workers who lose or change jobs in a tumultuous time of mergers and downsizing do not lose their medical insurance coverage because of pre-existing health conditions. That is what the bill's sponsors and supporters set out to do. Through the largely unquestioning news media, they persuaded the public that the bill would somehow make health insurance "portable," in the catchword that became ubiquitous — you lose your job, you take your insurance with you.

In fact, the law doesn't allow anyone to take his existing health insurance to a new job. It does make it easier for workers who had group coverage to get new insurance without satisfying a waiting period because of a pre-existing condition. But regardless of what the public heard or read repeatedly, only workers (or their dependents) with such conditions are affected by Kennedy-Kassebaum. And for workers who lose group coverage and need individual policies, the law sets up formidable hurdles. So far, says an aide to Congressman Pete Stark, a California Democrat active in health reform, "Anyone who calls this office falls outside the bill."

Kennedy-Kassebaum was the perfect symbolic law giving



the impression of solving a problem without doing much. The media, which had been widely criticized for superficial, horse-race coverage during the reform debate, were ready and eager to embrace the symbol, without questioning what was being passed, who would be helped, and

whose interests were protected. Says Trish Riley, executive director of the National Academy for State Health Policy, a research organization for state health agencies, "Everyone was so gleeful something was going to pass that the holes in Kennedy-Kassebaum were never well documented."

The legislation certainly wasn't the "landmark" celebrated by some in the press. As a Kennedy spokesman, Jim Manley, puts it: "I always said, and the staff said, it was a narrowly crafted and carefully targeted bill designed to address some of the worst abuses. I must admit that was sometimes lost. Some reports said the bill was more comprehensive than it was."

"Did we write about the potential concerns now cropping up?" asks Susan Dentzer, economics columnist for *U.S. News & World Report*. In a matter as complex as Kennedy-Kassebaum, she says, "It would have been difficult to get that into any paper. It's fair to say that it kind of got kissed off."

Indeed, Kennedy-Kassebaum doesn't do a lot of things the press said it would do, and does others — for example, it gives favors to doctors and insurers — that went almost entirely unnoticed. The media oversold the bill, misleading the public along the way. It inflated the number of people who would actually be helped by the measure, and almost never explained the complex procedures the law requires of people who try to get new policies — procedures that protect the insurance industry while making coverage hard to get for many who need it.

Above all, the press emphasized the notion of "portability" — a luxury the law simply does not provide. A story in *Time*,

Trudy Lieberman is a contributing editor of CJR. She is senior investigative editor at Consumer Reports. This article reflects her conclusions, not those of Consumer Reports.

headlined "The Coverage That Travels," for example, said "medical insurance could become as portable as a briefcase." *The Houston Chronicle* said the bill "would allow workers to carry their existing coverage from one job to another."

When the bill passed last August, *The New York Times* said it would "make health insurance portable between jobs"; a second story said it guaranteed workers' "ability to carry health insurance from job to job." *The Wall Street Journal* was a little closer to reality. It avoided the idea that people could "take" coverage with them, simply describing the law as making it "easier for people to keep their coverage if they lose or leave their jobs, even if they have pre-existing medical problems."

Editorial writers were particularly moved to hyperbole. A *Seattle Times* editorial declared the bill "would allow people moving from one job to another the right to transfer their insurance coverage," and *The Denver Post* cheered that it would enable "people who change jobs to take their insurance plans with them."

But it won't. The law doesn't require new employers to match the old employer's coverage, or to offer insurance at all. If the new employer does offer insurance, Kennedy-Kassebaum simply allows an employee to use evidence of prior coverage to reduce or eliminate the wait normally imposed by a pre-existing-conditions clause, which the law now limits to twelve months. (Many states had already barred insurers from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions, which commonly include some kinds of cancer, diabetes, and degenerative diseases.)

For people with pre-existing conditions who are forced to seek individual as opposed to group coverage, the barriers set up by Kennedy-Kassebaum can be daunting and costly. Those were the workers Senator Kassebaum was most concerned about. (A survey by the American Hospital Association released last fall found that the percentage of American workers and their families covered by employer-sponsored health insurance dropped from nearly 78 percent in 1990 to 74 percent in 1995, and is projected to fall to about 70 percent by 2002.) Under Kennedy-Kassebaum, someone buying nongroup coverage must have had health insurance for at least eighteen months, most recently from a group plan; use up continuation-of-benefits (COBRA) for at least another eighteen months (paying the entire premium); and then apply for a policy within sixty-two days of the end of the previous coverage — restrictions whose implications were largely unexplored by the media. Only then do insurers have to offer policies without restrictions on health conditions. For this coverage, they can charge almost anything they can get away with.

Spencer Rich in *The Washington Post* wrote stories showing with anecdotes how some people would or would not be helped. Only a handful of others used that obvious and valid approach, or pointed out that people with health problems are likely to pay very

high premiums for health insurance if they do qualify for coverage under the new law. Kennedy-Kassebaum did not address the question of affordability and was never intended to control the price of coverage. Although prices vary widely among companies, individuals buying coverage through HMOs often pay between \$1,500 and \$3,000 a year; family HMO policies can cost around \$5,000, but can be as much as \$9,000 in some plans. Traditional non-HMO policies are even more expensive.

During the debate, the insurance industry opposed efforts to make it easier for people who lose group coverage to buy individual policies. The industry argues that those people tend to be sicker and buy coverage because they need it immediately — exactly the group companies don't like to insure. But as a concession to insurers, the law does permit states to use their high-risk pools — mechanisms in which carriers in a state agree to pool resources, sometimes with state money added, to furnish coverage for unhealthy people. Insurance carriers generally like this approach because the pool policies tend to provide less coverage and carry higher premiums than conventional policies, effectively keeping people out of the market. Many pools also restrict the number of people who can get insurance.

As an alternative to the risk-pool approach, Kennedy-Kassebaum allows — but does not require — states to comply with federal standards that prescribe what policies a carrier must offer. Under those standards, an insurer must offer every individual policy it sells in the state, or the two most popular plans offering different levels of coverage.

During legislative maneuvering, the risk-pool solution for insuring the sick largely escaped media analysis. In April of last year, John Judis in *The New Republic* diagnosed the dangers of risk pools. "Senate and House sponsors have left a loophole in their bills to allow private insurers to evade their responsibility for insuring individuals with pre-existing conditions," he wrote, adding that risk pools are "bogs of fiscal insolvency." In October and December, Judis again tackled the subject, and again there was virtually no media follow-up.

Nor did the media pay much attention this spring to legislative action in the states, where insurance industry lobbyists roamed the capitols trying to establish risk pools — and not the federal standards — as the way to comply with the law. "Risk pools do an end-run around Kennedy-Kassebaum," says Brian Atchinson, Maine's insurance superintendent. "The media certainly didn't focus on the trench warfare taking place in the states to minimize the benefits of the law."

In Oklahoma, for instance, as of late May, *The Daily Oklahoman*, the *Tulsa World*, and even *The Journal Record*, which covers local business, did not cover a legislative debate over implementing Kennedy-Kassebaum. A state senator tried to put the brakes on a bill mandating risk pools and raise the possi-

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bility of using the federal options. "I had no press calls on this," says Senator Angela Monson, who represents Oklahoma City. "This is major health legislation. The implications can be far-reaching and long-lasting." One of her concerns: former welfare recipients who've lost Medicaid benefits and have to approach the risk pool for coverage, where the price can be 50 percent above the standard premium in the state — no doubt out of reach for many now moving into minimum-wage jobs.

By the end of May, twenty states, including Oklahoma, had opted for risk pools and twenty for other alternatives.

If the media overstated the effects of Kennedy-Kassebaum, they also inflated the number of people affected, and took at face value the claim made by Clinton, Kennedy, and others that 25 million people would benefit. That number, from a General Accounting Office report, assumed that all workers who changed jobs had a family member with a health condition that made him or her unacceptable to insurers, an unlikely proposition at best. In fact, according to a Commonwealth Fund/Kaiser Family Foundation study, only about one million people are unable to buy health insurance because of pre-existing conditions. "I don't think anyone dug into what was behind the 25 million," says Dr. Karen Davis, president of the Commonwealth Fund, a philanthropy based in New York that specializes in research on issues of health and aging. Among those informed, she said, "the word was 500,000 might benefit." *U.S. News & World Report* apparently wasn't sure which number to believe, telling readers that estimates of the number of people affected ranged from 1 million to 25 million.

Kennedy-Kassebaum was about much more than insuring a relative handful of people. Tucked into the measure were gifts worth millions to American Family Life Assurance Co. (AFLAC), the world's biggest seller of cancer insurance, and the American Medical Association, two of the largest contributors to congressional races. Yet the media spotlight hardly shone.

AFLAC's political action committee has contributed some \$2 million to candidates at the federal level in the last ten years and often makes the Federal Elections Commission top-donor lists. With Kennedy-Kassebaum, the insurer

succeeded in weakening protection built into a 1990 law aimed at ending the abuse in the sale of health insurance to the elderly. AFLAC's "dread disease" policies are unnecessary, and the 1990 law required companies selling such coverage to disclose on their policies: "This insurance duplicates some Medicare benefits." That language was meant to warn people not to buy the policies since the coverage is already provided by Medicare and Medicare-supplement policies.

Kennedy-Kassebaum eliminated that language, instead saying policies "must pay benefits without regard to other health benefit coverage to which you may be entitled under Medicare or other insurance." The new language suggests people can collect major benefits twice, but they can't. The language leaves them free to waste their money on "dread-disease" insurance.

American Health Line, an online health-news service, *The Washington*

WITH ALMOST NO
PRESS ATTENTION,
A WARNING AGAINST
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COVERAGE WAS CHANGED
TO MAKE IT SOUND LIKE
A GOOD THING

Post, and *U.S. News* ran stories about the weakened disclosure, with the *Post* noting that the provision's "low profile makes it more likely to survive as a technical correction in a complex health care overhaul." The profile was so low, the rest of the media seem to have missed it. (This spring, after AFLAC won a major victory in New York state, *The New York Times* played the story prominently. New York's insurance department announced plans to allow sales of "dread disease" policies in the state, where they had been banned for twenty-three years. AFLAC had campaigned vigorously for the change, spending more than \$175,000 on lobbyists and campaign contributions, the *Times* reported.)

The American Medical Association prevailed on Congress to require the Department of Health and Human Services to issue advisory opinions to physicians who ask if a particular busi-

ness practice, such as a referral fee paid by one health care provider to another, is legal. These arrangements can be highly lucrative for doctors. The Office of the Inspector General, which prosecutes Medicare kickback cases, says advisory opinions will make it easier for providers to evade anti-kickback statutes: a practice found legal for one doctor can become a kind of malleable template for others to copy, adding variations that are not legal. If challenged, the copycats can use the original opinion as a defense in an effort to avoid punishment.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that lost fines and penalties for violations of anti-kickback laws plus the extra expense of issuing opinions will cost the government nearly \$400 million over the next five years. The AMA is one of the largest contributors to congressional races. From the beginning of 1995 until Kennedy-Kassebaum's passage last August, its political action committee gave more than \$1.2 million to candidates for Congress. Contributions peaked during crucial negotiations on the bill.

In the spring of 1996, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala wrote a story in *Roll Call*, a twice-weekly newspaper that covers Congress, warning that the bill would weaken anti-fraud laws. UPI later moved a dispatch quoting a Justice Department official who made the same point. A NEXIS search suggests that no media organization picked up the UPI story or Shalala's views. "Reporting in the mainstream press was nonexistent," says Mac Thornton, chief counsel to the inspector general in Health and Human Services. "It's just too technical — too arcane. There are no sound bites here." The best post-mortem of Kennedy-Kassebaum was done last fall by Ramón Castellblanch in *In These Times*, hardly a mainstream news outlet. Castellblanch is not even a journalist; at the time, he was a doctoral candidate in health policy at Johns Hopkins.

Kennedy-Kassebaum was not sound-bite journalism, and the sound bites it did produce got it wrong or didn't register. It was, however, the kind of incremental health legislation Congress is likely to enact in coming years — highly technical, somewhat invisible, prone to overselling, and a repository for special favors for special interests. ♦

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First Amendment Watch

by Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy

Can a Journalist's Novel Be Libelous?

You have spent years as a journalist, chronicling events great and small, meeting fascinating, inspiring, and loathsome people, and filling reporters' notebooks with human drama more entertaining than anything you could dream up. So, you think, now it is time to turn those notebooks into a best-selling novel. You might not have the wild success of, say, Joe Klein with *Primary Colors*, but because it is fiction, at least you won't have to triple-check your facts or worry about defaming anyone, right? Well, maybe not.

As Klein found out, writing fiction is no guarantee of immunity from a libel suit. In the latest twist in the *Primary Colors* saga, he and his publisher, Random House, Inc., have been sued for defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

In the first few pages of *Primary Colors*, a southern governor contemplating a run for the presidency visits a Harlem adult literacy program run by a female librarian named Baum. A few pages later, the governor and Baum emerge disheveled from a hotel room. Now Daria Carter-Clark, a librarian who played host to then Governor Bill Clinton at her adult literacy program in Harlem, has come forward to declare that she is the fictional Baum. She also says that everyone knows the fictional governor is intended to be Bill Clinton. More important, she says, she never had sex with Bill Clinton after his trip to the library, or at any other time. Carter-Clark claims that she was defamed because she was portrayed as promiscuous, immoral, and unprofessional.

It may seem nonsensical to sue for defamation (publishing false and derogatory information about someone) based on a work of fiction. After all, how can fiction be "false"? But it is, as a matter of law, possible. It is just relatively rare to get anywhere with such a lawsuit. In addition to the usual hurdles a defamation plaintiff faces, you also have to prove that readers familiar with you would reasonably know that you are the one the author is writing about. And courts have been reluctant to stifle the creative process by allowing such lawsuits to go to

trial. Claims such as Carter-Clark's are often dismissed before they get anywhere near a jury.

But as a recent case illustrates, authors cannot count on that. A reader submitted a short story to *Seventeen's* "New Voices in Fiction" series. *Seventeen* published the story, identifying the author as Lucy Logsdon "from southern Illinois."

The story told of a fight between the narrator and a high school classmate, identified only as "Bryson," who is described as a "platinum-blond, blue-eye-shadowed, faded-blue-jeaned, black-polyester-topped shriek." At one point, the narrator also refers to Bryson as a "slut."

Enter young Kimberly Bryson, also of southern Illinois, who says she is the Bryson in the story. She also says that calling her a "slut" in a national magazine is defamatory and places her in a false light. She sues the story's author and *Seventeen's* parent company, Rupert Murdoch's News America Publications, Inc.

Like Carter-Clark, Bryson claimed that she was defamed because she was portrayed as promiscuous. Like Joe Klein, the novice author's primary defense is that she wrote a work of fiction. Two lower Illinois courts agreed and dismissed the claim; one declared that "slut" was merely an opinion uttered by "a fictional character about another fictional character."

But the state's highest court reversed those decisions and ordered that the case go forward. The Illinois Supreme Court brushed aside the label "fiction" and said it was reasonable for people who knew the real-life Bryson to conclude that she and the fictional Bryson were one and the same. The court relied heavily on the use of the same unusual name and the setting in southern Illinois. The dissent thought the court had made it too easy for Bryson to sue for defamation and feared the opinion would "pave the way for frivolous lawsuits whenever something caustic is written, even in a fictional story."

Presumably Joe Klein will now find out if that dire prediction comes true. In his case, the fictional librarian and her alleged real-life counterpart do not share the same name. Still, *Primary Colors* became a best-seller at least in part because we all knew who the major characters were "supposed to be." (The only real mysterious identity for a while was the author.) If the fictional Governor Jack Stanton was a stand-in for Bill Clinton, why not Ms. Baum for Ms. Carter-Clark? In addition, Klein was along for the

WRITING FICTION IS NO GUARANTEE OF IMMUNITY FROM A LAWSUIT

Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy are attorneys who co-authored two best-selling books, In Our Defense and The Right to Privacy. This column is underwritten by the Janice and Saul Poliak Center for First Amendment Studies at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.



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MISCELLANEOUS

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ride when campaigner Clinton visited the Harlem program. Nonetheless, as much as some of the actions and characters in the book mirror real life, others are clearly "fiction."

These messy facts will all be sorted out by a jury if the case goes to trial. But will it ever get there? *Bryson* is not binding in New York state, where Klein's case will be decided and where courts are generally protective of authors' First Amendment rights. "The *Primary Colors* case will be dismissed," predicts Jan Constantine, general counsel for News America Publications, Inc. She also says that, though her client may have a harder time in Illinois, News America will continue to fight the *Bryson* case as it heads toward trial.

The still larger question these cases raise is how much breathing room we should allow fiction writers (or journalists turned novelists), who inevitably draw on real-life experiences to create their fictional worlds. Labeling a work "fiction" cannot give the author carte blanche to defame someone. Yet the Illinois court's sweeping language in allowing *Bryson*'s case to go forward is alarming. The court said that the story was "not so fanciful or ridiculous that no reasonable person would interpret it as describing actual persons or events . . . [It] portrays realistic characters responding in a realistic manner to realistic events." But isn't that what many authors strive for? Under the *Bryson* court's broad language, only science fiction writers could feel truly protected against a defamation charge.

"What is also really disturbing about *Bryson*," says lawyer Constantine, "is that the story was part of a program to encourage young writers. Now we may not be able to do these kinds of programs because, as a practical matter, you cannot vet every one of these submissions. Publishers looking for new voices will be at risk."

Indeed, if the *Primary Colors* case goes anywhere, even seasoned journalists may think twice before spinning their reporters' notebooks into the great American novel they have always been meaning to write. ♦

Books

All About Clare

by Nora Sayre

She sent floral tributes to herself at her office at *Vanity Fair*, where she wrote a favorable unsigned review of her first book, *Stuffed Shirts*. She boasted that she'd invented the term "a new deal" (she hadn't). A lukewarm feminist, she claimed to have been a vigorous supporter of women's rights, but she worked only very briefly for a National Woman's Party. Her five years at Condé Nast began in 1929 when she sat down at an empty desk at *Vogue* and started to work on assignments that arrived there; the publisher and the editor each assumed that the other had hired her.

Clare Boothe had been teetotal on deceit: she wrote that she was "surrounded by lies" in childhood — when her unmarried mother pretended to be a widow. Boothe kept reinventing herself and her past, showing a contempt for facts long before she met Henry Luce, whose magazines were also often heedless about reality.

The legendary editor, playwright, war correspondent, and congresswoman even had a false birth date engraved on her tombstone. Born in Manhattan in 1903, the illegitimate child of a much-married traveling salesman (a promoter of pianos and patent medicines, an irregular violinist), she was raised in poverty, which was sometimes alleviated by her mother's openhanded lovers. The mother — at times a call girl, eventually married to a doctor — believed that a woman needed "big pearls and small hips," and she fanned Clare's determination to "marry for money — lots of it."

The daughter's first husband was millionaire George Tuttle Brokaw, a thundering lush. Divorced at twenty-six, Clare was soon a junior editor at *Vanity Fair*, which *Time*

had characterized as "glossy smartchat" and "blithe monthly blurbs" aimed at café society. *Vanity Fair* had published such writers as Colette, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, and André Gide (though it appears that some celebrities submitted their minor work). Magnificent photographs by Edward Steichen, Cecil Beaton, and others were the magazine's most exciting feature.

Rage for Fame, Sylvia Jukes Morris's scrupulous biography of Clare Boothe Luce, shows that manipulating men, spending their money, and trying to share their power became a habit early in her life. An affair with *Vanity Fair*'s managing editor as well as her own headlong energies swiftly advanced her career, and she wrote pieces and stories that jeered at the rich. Frank Crowninshield, the editor-in-chief, saw her as "a bibelot of the most enchanting order"; in her diary she referred to him "piddling, effusive, charming, ineffectual as usual."

In 1930, considering his focus old-fashioned, she commissioned more articles on current events than the magazine

had had before. Multimillionaire Bernard Baruch, adviser to presidents, became her foremost lover; married and thirty-



The Life correspondent in a Burma trench, April 1942

RAGE FOR FAME: THE ASCENT OF CLARE BOOTHE LUCE

BY SYLVIA JUKES MORRIS
RANDOM HOUSE
562 PP. \$30.

two years older than she, he was a Democrat whose ideas resembled those of a conservative Republican. But when he finally supported Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, she followed. (Later she would despise and attack FDR.) The managing editor, who had promoted her and applauded her "progress to

Nora Sayre is the author of *Previous Convictions: A Journey Through the 1950s and Sixties Going on Seventies*.

GEORGE RODGER/LIFE (TIME INC.)

fame and fortune," was wretched with jealousy; he died in a car crash that some thought a suicide. Soon thereafter she moved into his job.

Her editorial style was both cogent and loquacious. To columnist Drew Pearson, who had been assigned to do a piece on Jack the Ripper, she wrote that she had "always" found the Ripper "the most exciting, thrilling, gruesome, spectacular, mysterious, and blood-curdling of murderers." But Pearson's piece left her "not the least bit frightened or appalled." She called for specifics: "For instance, you say

'her murder was indescribable in its savagery,' 'the operator must have been at least two hours over his hellish job.' Now, what was his hellish job; what did he do to his victims; how did he leave their remains . . . I promise you that when you write about Jack the Ripper and don't describe his crime, it's like telling a ghost story and, at the last moment, omitting the ghost."

Meanwhile, her attraction to politics expanded: "What I could do in Washington is without end." Resigning from *Vanity Fair*, she began writing plays. Soon after encountering her, Henry

Luce was besotted. Shortly before her wedding in 1935, Baruch ended their three-year affair — "the eagle never shares his mate with another" — but cheerfully paid all the bills for her Paris trousseau. As Clare made clear in interviews with her biographer, the Luce's sexual problems began well before they

The men at Time regarded the boss's wife as a "potent ogre"

married — with her, he was repeatedly impotent — but on a rare vacation he wrote that laughter "tinkled in her heart . . . and her breasts were uproarious in their unsolemn love."

I thought it would be impossible to be sorry for Henry Luce. Although his empire was staffed with many gifted people, some of whom were contemptuous of its products, his omnipotence was undeniable — Dwight Macdonald, employed by *Fortune* in the early 1930s, called him "Il Luce" — and his Olympian self-assurance seemed unsailable. In 1938 he informed his executives, "Time is the most powerful publication in America." But Luce was as naive about women as he was about Mussolini (who was celebrated in the Lucepress in the 1930s). When Luce's impatient wife berated him for not "really" loving her, declaring her devotion to him and their "royal marriage" right before flying off to visit a potential lover, you can feel a twinge of sympathy for the ponderous tycoon.

As depicted in this book, Clare Boothe Luce was destructive, rapacious, clever without substantial intelligence, cruel to some who loved her. At the same time she dwelled in a world of ferocious misogyny. Any such enterprising woman would have been disliked or reviled at Time Inc., where the editors feared she might be influential. (She did help to develop the concept of *Life*, but its editors excluded her from an executive job.) We don't need to admire her in order

WHY IS THIS STORY SO HARD TO SEE?

If a former leader of intellectual conservatism had revealed the existence of a right-wing militia that killed a dozen people (and got away with the murders), and was supported by leading Republican politicians and funded by a conservative elite, it is reasonably certain that the journalistic community would take notice.

Radical Son, recently published by The Free Press, is a memoir recounting just such events. Only the story David Horowitz tells is about a left-wing militia—the Black Panther Party—and about leading Democrats and liberals, who supported and funded them. Perhaps that is a sufficient answer to the question above. Perhaps not.

Radical Son is written with the authority of one who was there. "Other writers of the New Left figured larger in the awareness of the general public," Paul Berman wrote of Horowitz in the *Village Voice*; "but no one in those days figured larger among the left-ists themselves."

Now Horowitz has told the story of the murder that caused him to leave the left, and of his twenty-year campaign to bring this story to light.

David Horowitz
CO-ANALYST OF DESTRUCTIVE GENERATION

Radical Son

A Generational Odyssey

Simon & Schuster

to resent the way she was often treated — especially by the men who regarded her as a “potent ogre.”

Ridicule was her writer's instrument; she wasn't sufficiently witty to be a satirist. Of all her creations, *The Women* will endure as a classic ice-pick comedy. As the characters fling toxic darts at one another, at least five decades of spectators have called them foolish, greedy, and brutal, complaining that the play makes women per se look stupid. But it is still savagely amusing. There were rumors that George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart (investors in *The Women*) had rewritten parts of it, followed by abundant denials — which aren't fully convincing, since the play is far funnier than anything else she wrote.

Elsewhere Luce's prose was shot with gush, as when she was an occasional *Life* war correspondent portraying a Chinese peasant and his land: “The toiling son of Han plows his lovingly hoarded thin excrement back into the weakening soil. The rice, the millet, the soybean, even the peaches and persimmons he eats become compound of him, he of them most intimately . . . Rising convulsively, the rivers drive the ravenous and surplus crop-man from it, or trap him under turgid waters by thousands, plowing him under, to fertilize the good and weary earth, with rich silt and slime, and with flesh and bones built of rice and peaches.” As for the Sahara Desert: “Its vast, blind, dry demonic face, pocked with scabrous holes, pimpled with jagged rocks, wrinkled with barren waddies, bearded like the jowls of a lunatic with dirty tufts of scrub or camels'-thorn . . .” It seems kinder not to complete the sentence.

How to weigh the assets of Clare Boothe Luce? She had a colossal talent for publicity and the brawniest kind of all-American drive. Her biographer calls her “a modestly gifted entertainer,” and that seems fair. The book ends in 1942, when her career as a Republican member of Congress began, so we must wait for a second volume to hear about her conversion to Catholicism and the rabid red-baiting. The prose of the Lucepress would be altered over the decades and the right-wing politics would slowly yield in the mid-seventies to a quasi-liberalism — which outraged Clare Boothe Luce throughout Watergate.

Luce chose Morris to be her biographer, and they spent lots of time together in Luce's last six years (she died in 1987). Propinquity can be perilous: now and then Morris's style seems infected by Luce's, and her editor should have caught some luscious phrases: “angel-faced Clare,” “blonde and exquisite in

She had a colossal talent for publicity and the brawniest kind of all-American drive

eye-catching white velvet,” “he happily surrendered to her charms.” But *Rage for Fame* is meticulously researched and extremely tactful; you sense that Morris wanted to sympathize with her subject and hopes that we will. Yet Luce comes across as high trash — not because she was “indulging sexual appetites unsatisfied by her marriage,” but because many of her utterances and reflections were trivial. Or pretentious: “It's going to be a long war, and I want to keep track of the army.”

There's also a credibility problem, since many passages depend on Luce's diaries, which she turned over to Morris and which reveal her feelings but can hardly be trusted as facts. The diaries are also a source of questionable dialogue: some exchanges sound like Lucean fiction. Yet there are flashes of self-knowledge: “My heart is heavy, and I know I am worthless, shallow, insincere with everyone — and myself.” That has the ring of authenticity.

But although she mainly appears to be so unpleasant that you can't imagine her having any friends, Wilfrid Sheed's robust and touching memoir, *Clare Boothe Luce* (1982), introduces us to a woman who was capable of compassion and generosity — whom few others seem to have known. But in neither book can we quite discover the inner Luce, despite Morris's estimable efforts to explain her. In the meantime the biography is engrossing as a chronicle of dishonesties, a lifetime of fabrications. ♦

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Excerpts

THE WAYWARD PRESS CRITIC



Whittaker Chambers

FROM **WHITTAKER CHAMBERS**, BY SAM TANENHAUS. RANDOM HOUSE. 638 PP. \$35.

Hiss's team of attorneys had already begun a thorough ransacking of Chambers's past. The Hiss team also searched for evidence Chambers had been institutionalized and was homosexual. Communist party contacts turned up ex-comrades with much to say . . . Hiss himself kept his lawyers supplied with useful tips on Chambers, many obtained through "anonymous" sources, presumably Hiss's own recollections.

Chambers's *Time* adversaries also offered help, repeating stories of his paranoia. Another helpful source was the journalist A.J. Liebling, *The New Yorker's* press critic. In the fall of 1948 Liebling acquired a second role as clandestine operative for Alger Hiss. Conveniently exempting himself from the standards he applied to his fellow journalists, Liebling tricked Chambers's mentor Mark Van Doren into handing over his Chambers correspondence and then delivered the letters to Hiss's attorney Harold Rosenwald. Van Doren rued this deception. Liebling did not. In fact, with remarkable audacity, he continued to report on the case in his "Wayward Press" columns even as he tweaked the nation's dailies for their biased coverage.

Tanenhause is the author of *Literature Unbound: A Guide for the Common Reader*.

SINCEREST FLATTERIES

FROM **THE CULTURE OF THE COPY: STRIKING LIKENESSES, UNREASONABLE FACSIMILES**, BY HILLEL SCHWARTZ. ZONE BOOKS. 566 PP. \$29.50.

The first American book on photography re-touched an English book, *Photographic Manipulation*. Sermons on honesty were read out from the pulpit by Victorian ministers who had handcopied them from printed books so as to seem to have an original text at hand. A *Boston Globe* story on the swiping of a commencement address in 1991 was allegedly swiped by *The New York Times*. Lexicographers responsible for defining plagiarism have been accused of plagiarizing definitions. A University of Oregon booklet plagiarized its section on plagiarism.

Given this compulsion to repeat that which bears on repeating, plagiarism in our culture of the copy appears inevitable. Inevitable, as one famous

estimate had it, because the number of different ideas the human mind is capable of is 3,655,760,000, and while there may be a slight hope that all the ideas have not yet been bespoken, there is a high probability of coincidence of unconscious repetition. "As if there was much of anything in any human utterance, oral or written, except plagiarism!" wrote Mark Twain. "The kernel, the soul — let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances — is plagiarism." He was writing to Helen Keller, who herself at the age of twelve had unconsciously (re)written and published as her own a story read aloud to her years before.



A mid-nineteenth century drawing from a 1766 sculpture. The motto reads, "In falsehood, truth."

Schwartz is the author of, among other books, *Century's End: A Cultural History of the Fin de Siecle from the 1990s through the 1900s*.

SAY "PLEASE"

FROM **MISS MANNERS RESCUES CIVILIZATION: FROM SEXUAL HARASSMENT, FRIVOLOUS LAWSUITS, DISSING, AND OTHER LAPSES IN CIVILITY**, BY JUDITH MARTIN. CROWN PUBLISHERS, INC. 497 PP. \$30.



Judith Martin

The argument that journalistic rudeness ultimately serves the public is a false one, because these techniques rarely produce information. Those who disrupt events, disassociating themselves symbolically by flouting the standards of dress and decorum of others present, cannot expect to find out what they would in the fly-on-the-wall position.

If you ask a rude question, you're going to get a rude answer, and rude answers are not informative ones. Miss Manners has never learned anything from a reply to such crass inquiries as "How do you feel about your children being killed?" although she sometimes has from the polite inquiry, "Is there a lesson for society in all this?" No one seems moved to open up after being asked, "What are you trying to cover up?" but a polite invitation to "give your side of the story" yields amazing results.

Overexposure to thrillers and courtroom dramas has persuaded the society that truth and justice are only achieved through unpleasantness. Journalists, who have only to ask one polite question to have people pour out their hearts to them, should know better.

Martin writes the internationally syndicated column "Miss Manners."

6-MARTINI STRUGGLE

FROM **RADICAL SON: A GENERATIONAL ODYSSEY**, BY DAVID HOROWITZ. THE FREE PRESS. 468 PP. \$27.50.

Ramparts occupied something of an ambivalent place in the imagination of the Left [in the 1960s]. Its glossy, four-color format was in striking contrast to the newsprint tabloids of the "underground press," and aroused suspicion in a movement that rejected the symbols of capitalist success. The personal styles of its editors reinforced these doubts. [Political editor Robert] Scheer lived in a spacious two-story brown shingle on Benvenue Avenue, in a posh section of the south campus area. He paid himself an annual salary of \$25,000 — three times that of staff writers like me, and five times what the black receptionist made. [Editor-in-chief Warren] Hinckle set a pace that was even more flamboyant. Three-hour, six-martini editorial lunches at Vanessi's Restaurant in San Francisco, junkets to



David Horowitz (foreground) with colleagues Peter Collier and Perry Fellwock

the Algonquin Hotel in New York, and first-class fare wherever he and Scheer went, added fodder to the Left's indictment. On the other hand, *Ramparts*'s radical credentials could not be so easily dismissed. Its campaign against the CIA, its Black Panther franchise, its publication of Che Guevara's diaries — approved personally by Fidel — were bona fides that commanded respect.

Horowitz is the co-author of The Rockefellers and The Kennedys, and editor of the journal Heterodoxy. He was an editor at Ramparts from 1968 until 1973.

DOWN ARGENTINE WAY

FROM **THE LIFE OF NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER: WORLDS TO CONQUER, 1908-1958**, BY CARY REICH. DOUBLEDAY BOOKS. 875 PP. \$35.

On June 30, 1945, Juan Perón summoned U.S. ambassador Spruille Braden to his office in the Casa Rosada. Unlike their previous encounters since Braden's arrival in Buenos Aires — when Perón greeted Braden with warm abrazos and effusive professions of friendship — the Argentine leader received his guest frigidity, without even a handshake. "Sit down," he snapped.

"There is a movement and movements to overthrow me," Perón began, "and we will not stand for it. If these groups try anything we will fight in the streets and blood will flow."

That was very interesting, Braden replied, but what did that have to do with Argentine-United States relations?

"It has to do with them because your journalists form a part of these movements."

Braden protested that the American reporters had nothing to do with the opposition, but Perón was adamant. His supporters, he went on, were "enraged" by the attacks on the regime in the U.S. press: so enraged that "in their fanatical adoration for me they are entirely capable of murdering [Arnaldo] Cortesi [the *New York Times* correspondent] or anyone they think stands in their way."

Shuddering in disgust and disbelief at Perón's only faintly veiled threat, Braden made it clear that any attack on Cortesi or any other correspondent would have "serious repercussions on friendly relations between Argentina and the U.S." To this, Perón responded that of course he knew who these fanatics were and would keep them under observation. But he "could not guarantee that some fanatic from the country would not kill Cortesi and then commit suicide."

As soon as he emerged, shaken, from this interview, Braden contacted Cortesi and the other American reporters and offered them sanctuary in the U.S. embassy. Then he fired off a cable to his superiors in Washington: "Perón's astonishing outburst . . . confirms he is dangerous . . . I recommend that Dept. read riot act to Argentine Ambassador and I be



Nelson A. Rockefeller

instructed specifically and in detail to make similar protest here."

Braden's missive was quickly brought to the attention of James Byrnes. In one of his first acts as secretary of state, Byrnes dispatched a telegram to his ambassador: "You are instructed to call on Colonel Perón and to state that this Government takes a very grave view of the implications in Colonel Perón's statement that the lives of American citizens and representatives of reputable American newspapers are in danger and that they cannot be protected by the Argentine Government; that this government expects the Argentine Government to give categorical assurances that they will take all requisite measures to guard the safety of the American correspondents . . ."

Had all this happened even a month earlier, Rockefeller [as assistant secretary of state for Latin America] might have pooh-poohed the whole affair as so much empty posturing by Perón. He might have repeated his customary words of caution about interference in another country's internal affairs. But this time there were no such admonitions. Perhaps it was because of the precariousness of his own position, and the realization that the policy drift, under Byrnes, was now moving away from him. Or perhaps it was a recognition that in heedlessly threatening American nationals and the American press, Perón had finally stepped over the line.

Whatever the reason, the first faint notes of a new tune could be heard from the assistant secretary. Instead of restraining Braden or cautioning him, Rockefeller phoned the ambassador and pronounced himself "simply delighted" with how Braden was handling the situation.

Reich, a former executive of Institutional Investor, is the author of Financier: The Biography of André Meyer.

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Essay

by Mike Hoyt

In Praise of Singularity

Convergence is that force that is supposed to blend our computers into our TVs into our toaster ovens, mix all media into one shiny digital river. I worry about a corollary; call it content convergence. Already, neutrons from story A are mating irresponsibly with protons from story B. Wait till Paula Jones gets closer to court and *The New York Times* and *National Enquirer* sides of the press meet at the question of those distinguishing marks on the president.

In order to converge, my theory goes, news wants to be homogenized, both in substance and style. Local TV has all but surrendered to this force and newspapers are next. This spring I drove my family south, twenty-six hours straight, most of it on I-95, a route so featureless that our sense of the Southland came only from the waitresses at the waffle joints where we stopped for coffee and from the newspapers we bought at every opportunity. We did better with the waitresses. The newspapers felt interchangeable, as if they had been conceived and produced at the same shopping mall in the same air-conditioned room. Maybe it was the caffeine.

Around that time came a trio of deaths that made people in the business think about newspapers and where they're going. Herb Caen of the *San Francisco Chronicle* had already died on February 1, at 80; Mike Royko of the *Chicago Tribune* died April 29, at 64; Murray Kempton of *Newsday* on May 5, at 79.

In San Francisco, thousands gathered to say goodbye to Caen in that city's way. Robin Williams spoke ("Hello, my name is Charlton Heston," he began) and Joan Baez sang. Dozens of bars advertised specials on vodka martinis, the columnist's drink, and Mayor Willie Brown told of Caen's dry route to that dry martini when it was raining: "... through that hotel, through the back door, out the alley, through the Emporium, out the door, through the Flood Building, through the garage at Ellis and Stockton..." and so forth. Caen knew his way around. He wrote not so much a unified thought as a series of by-the-way bulletins: that ship that docked in our beautiful harbor this morning lost a man overboard out at sea; that bureaucrat who wrote the memo about how city employees ought to live in the city? He lives in the 'burbs. Caen's connection with readers had to do with a shared sense of place, with the accumulation of telling detail built up over nearly fifty-nine years.

Mike Royko, a heavyweight boxer of a columnist, connected

in a different way. He had the only office at the *Tribune* where smoking was allowed, and there was something incorrect and fuming in there. Royko's subject was the screwing of the common man, although he could be startlingly tender as well. He could describe so clearly, for example, the sense of belonging and community that kept an old lady running her dry-cleaning establishment in a deteriorating neighborhood.

Of the three, the one I read was Kempton. I was even lucky enough to meet him once, at the trial of a union leader accused of corruption, one of those fallen angels he had such a weakness for. Sydney Schanberg reported, in a posthumous salute in *Newsday*, that Mario Cuomo once asked him, "How can I get Murray Kempton to love me?" "Well, Governor," Schanberg replied, "why don't you get yourself indicted?"

What amazed me was that Kempton talked as he wrote, in those long and curlicued sentences, nuance balanced against nuance, until the whole thought either condensed into fog or else captured something elusive and important with the clarity of a photo snapped in sunlight. He was rooted in the day-to-day — trials, issues, elections — but he was after cosmic fish. He took risks, as Nat Hentoff put it in another salute, not merely with the shaping of sentences, "but in his perceptions."

We can find commonalities in these writers but distinctions are more to the point. You cannot imagine Royko's mythical everyman, Slats Grobnik, wandering into a Caen column or a Caen pun slipping into Kempton or quotes from Kempton's obscure poets and saints getting comfortable in either of the other two men's prose. Nor can you imagine transferring these three into each other's city. Each was unique, anti-convergent.

I am not one of those who think years on a Royal typewriter built better writers. We have many wonderful columnists still coming up. But I fear the newspapers that Caen, Royko, and Kempton came of age in were more nourishing to the oddball singularity of their gifts than newspapers are now. Newspapers have lost some confidence and in their quiet panic they act against their nature. They strain to please. They sand off their edges. They yearn for the dull comforts of convergence like an alcoholic yearns for drink.

Francis X. Clines, saluting Kempton in *The New York Observer*, wrote that working next to Kempton affirmed for him that newspapering is "the best business because it allowed for Murray." It's true. But when it's more true once again, newspapers will have fewer problems than they do today. ♦



Royko, Kempton, and Caen

ROYKO: AP WIDEWORLD PHOTO/FRED JEWELL; KEMPTON: MARY ALLEN; CAEN: SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Mike Hoyt is a senior editor at CJR.

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Senior Investigator
Medicaid Fraud Control Unit
NYS Attorney General's Office



Ralph W. Cox
Finger Lakes
Blue Cross and Blue Shield

Background:
Special Assistant Attorney General,
NYS Medicaid Fraud Control Unit,
Welfare Fraud Prosecutor
Monroe County DA's Office



Gerard J. Gallagher
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New York Post 1/16/97

First female Marines train for combat with men

The Newton (Iowa) Daily News 4/1/97

Wildlife benefit from special hunting privileges

The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Wash.) 12/1/96

Denver Chapter will have senator for breakfast

People for the West! (Pueblo, Colo.) 4/97

FSC promotes Child Prevention Month

Navy Compass (San Diego, Ca.) 4/18/97

For some context, consider these numbers from the same year, as reported by the Cleveland Plain Dealer: 91 percent of clergy were men, 92 percent of engineers were men, 90 percent of men were dentists.

(York, Pa.) Daily Record 4/24/97

Banana faces sodomy charges

The Examiner (Cork, Ireland) 5/9/97

HOT PROPERTY



Cindy Crawford

1929 Charmer to Get Face-Lift

The Angels will honor Jackie Robinson with a pre-game ceremony Sunday, April 6 before playing the Cleveland Indians.

"It could still happen, but he's making a lot of progress," said Giants manager Dusty Baker. "He needs to get some at-bats. We'll see what he can do the rest of this week. So far, he's doing wonderful."

The Outlook (Santa Monica, Calif.) 3/26/97

Los Angeles Times 3/16/97

81 Too Old for Police Academy

The New York Times 4/14/97

War epic 'The English Channel' sweeps Academy Awards

Southeast Missourian 3/25/97

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Honolulu Star-Bulletin 4/16/97

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